Souls in Hell

John O'Neill



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Souls in Hell

SOULS IN HELL

A Mystery of the Unseen

BY

JOHN O'NEILL

NICHOLAS L. BROWN
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TO

J I M M Y

A BRAVE SOLDIER

THE PROLOGUE

It was the first time I had seen him.

I had gone to the corner drug-store for the double purpose of quenching my thirst with a lemon phosphate (which I needed badly, being as dry as the proverbial lime-kiln), and waiting for the train which would take me back to the city. Being able to see the train signals for about a mile down the track, I preferred killing time in the drug-store enjoying my phosphate than sitting on a hard bench, and tiring my eyes looking at the raw pea-green walls of the almost deserted railroad station, which in the oppressive heat smelled of new varnish and stale milk cans.

It was more restful, too, in the drug-store.

Shaded by the large plane trees at the edge of the sidewalk, and by its own striped awnings, compared with the outside blistering heat and brilliant sunshine it was a veritable oasis. The pleasant smells of drugs, perfumery, soaps, talcums, and all the other untabulated odors that pervade a drug-store which make it a desirable place on a hot day, soothed my tired nerves. The drowsy hum of the few persons there—who used the store, apparently, as a meeting-place for the exchange of local gossip as well as for the buying of things—made a droning obligato to the tinkle of the soda and ice-cream glasses.

After the bustle and feverish activity of the city, the feeling of languor was delightful. It seemed hardly possible that this place, with its *dolce far niente* air, was but a short hour's ride from the big ant-hill—New York—with its teeming millions working day and night, always in a hurry, always on the go, always trying to get ahead of the one in front (and falling over their own feet in their haste), hustling even in their hours of recreation; it was hardly credible; it seemed like a day-dream.

I was on the point of saying to the soda-counter clerk what a relief it was to come to such a quiet spot when the hum of the subdued tones—which were affecting me like a lullaby—was suddenly broken by a high-pitched feminine voice exclaiming, "There he goes now! There he is! See him?"

In a moment all was hubbub.

Everybody rushed to the end of the store; even the drug clerk, who, up to that time, had been doing his work in a listless, tired fashion, straightened up as if galvanized and craned his neck in the effort to see. Turning to discover the reason for all the sudden excitement I saw that almost everybody in the place was crowded at the window at the far end, attracted by something outside; which, apparently, had evoked the exclamations of one of the women. Curious to know the cause, I joined the crowd at the window.

I was just in time to catch sight of some policemen; four walking in pairs, one pair behind the other. Between the first pair was a tall young man dressed in a well-cut suit of civilian clothes—the coat closely buttoned, walking with an athletic stride, his arms swinging free at his sides. Although he was in sight

but a few moments, for he and the officers turned the corner to go down the side street, the young fellow made a great impression on me; an impression I could not, at the moment account for. Slim of figure with square shoulders and flat back, his head held proudly erect, with the eyes gazing steadily to the front as if he were on parade, the supple swing, the springy walk, all gave him the air of a military officer; which was in marked contrast to that of the countrified-looking policemen in their ill-fitting uniforms. He, who looked as though he might be a leader of men, seemed strangely out of place in their company—as a prisoner.

I wondered who he was.

When he had passed out of sight I turned to go back to the soda counter, and as I threaded my way through the groups of women who were expressing their sympathy at his plight I passed two men, one being,—as I guessed from his lordly 'I am so-and-so' manner,—a 'somebody' in the little town. The other, a small man clothed in a rusty suit and a deferential humility, spoke as I approached, and I caught the words, "Too bad, too bad! Such a fine looking young chap too." He shook his head dolefully as he glanced up at the big man to see if his sentiments were in accord with those of his pompous companion. "I'm afraid it's the electric chair for him. Don't you think so?"

The other—the pompous somebody who looked like one of those men who dearly like to take the chair at a country political meeting, and give the impression that he is in touch with the inner circle of the local political machine—rolled his big cigar lazily from the corner of his mouth to the centre and back again,

taking a deep breath during the performance; then delivered himself of an opinion, half muttered, half growled:

"Caught with the gun in his hand, red-handed as one might say, what can he expect?" He tilted his hat with his fat finger as he glanced sideways from under his heavy lids at a newcomer.

"Certainly looks pretty black for him," the small man agreed. "What do they say down at the Town Hall?" he inquired with a solicitous air. "Do they think he has any chance of getting off?"

I had paused within sound of their voices, pretending to be interested in the bottles of perfume tastefully arranged on the stand in the centre of the store, for I was curious to hear the answer. I had to wait until the heavy jowled 'somebody' leisurely took the cigar from his lips, and looked at it with an air of deliberation; evidently he believed in making his utterances as weighty as possible.

"Well . . . the old man—the Chief—told me yesterday that the boy's lawyer hasn't much hopes for him," he grunted finally. "He thinks he'll be lucky to get a verdict of manslaughter. Darned lucky!"

"Gee! Is that so? Even that'll be a hard blow for Cogan and his wife," said the small man, looking glum.

The scraps of conversation had sharpened my curiosity, but had not enlightened me much until the last remark—which gave me the clue; then I realized that the young fellow was Jack Waller now on trial for the murder of the matinee idol, Benton the actor, only recently returned from a tour in Europe.

The affair had created a big sensation in New York City, especially in the theatrical world where Benton

had been a well-known figure; while to this little suburban colony of commuters—artists, literary folk, and business men who had put Malvern Beach (as it was called) on the map—the tragedy had come like a bolt out of the clear sky, more particularly because it affected two of the most prominent and best liked in the colony—Tom Cogan and his handsome wife.

As it was imperative that my wife should have quiet surroundings,—for she was a bundle of frayed nerves (the not unnatural result of living in a noisy apartment house where the bachelor who lived above us came home 'lit up', and moved the furniture around in the wee sma' hours, and where the woman who cleaned his apartment dropped flatirons on the kitchen floor in the daytime)—I had taken the day off to run down from the city to this pretty suburban place for the purpose of looking over a couple of bungalows with a view to renting one. When the real estate agent pointed out to me the numerous advantages of the place he made much of the fact that most of the commuters were, like myself, of the professional class, so that I could soon make plenty of friends and feel at home; but it did not occur to me at the time that this was the same little town where the mysterious murder of Benton the actor had been committed.

Although I had more than a nodding acquaintance with Cogan, and had read all about the case in the newspapers, I had not realized that this was *the place.* I suppose my mind was so occupied with the necessity of closing the real estate deal as quickly as possible—for I was very busy on a 'rush' order for posters for a Motion Picture Film Company, and couldn't well spare the time I was taking—that I did not remember

the connection of the town with the crime; now, of course, the whole affair flashed into my mind.

"So that's Jack Waller, eh?" I remarked to the clerk when I got back to the counter.

He nodded affirmatively. "Yep, that's young Waller."

"He is a fine looking young chap. Doesn't look much like a murderer."

"As fine a young fellow as ever stepped in shoe leather. Often came in here and chatted with me. A perfect gentleman. A Jim Dandy!" He jerked out the words as he wiped the counter.

"Doesn't seem possible that a chap of his type would commit such a cold-blooded crime, unless it was done in the heat of anger or in self-defence," I said; wondering if I were right in the favorable impression Waller had made on me.

"Everybody in this town feels the same as you do, sir, and they'd be glad to see him get off scot-free; but"— — —

He paused in his wiping, and, with a doubtful shake of his head, pursed up his lips significantly.

"But what?" I asked.

"Why . . . everything is dead against him—the evidence I mean," he explained, "and . . . blest if I can see how he's going to get out of it. If it depended on the people here I'd bet he'd be leg-free before tomorrow morning. Nearly everyone knows him round here, and they all say he's a fine, everyday kind of feller, no swelled head or anything like that; just a plain, clean American lad."

"And you say that the evidence is all against him?"

He nodded, then turned his head quickly toward the side window.

"Excuse me, sir, but didn't you say you were waiting for the New York train?" he asked, turning to me.

"Yes. Is she signalled?" I had, for the moment, completely forgotten the train. I looked to answer my own question, and saw the warning cloud of smoke halfway down the track.

"Well, let us hope young Waller will get off," I said, as I started toward the door, waving my hand in farewell.

"I sure hope he will," responded the clerk, nodding a goodbye.

In the train I tried to recall what the newspapers had said about the case and its principal figure—Jack Waller. Although, as I said, it had created a sensation at the time, the kaleidoscopic life of the big city is so crowded with incidents, each day bringing new surprises, one is likely to forget the details of matters even more prominent than the usual. At about that time, too, I was putting in about eighteen hours a day, working at top speed, and the only chance I got of reading the news was the hasty glance I gave the headlines at breakfast time; so my knowledge of the details of the case was very scanty.

I did remember that Jack Waller, who was an aviator attached to the American Escadrille, had volun-

teered for some extra hazardous job. At the moment I couldn't for the life of me recall just what it was; but it was so successful, and meant so much to the French Army—in a particularly dangerous situation at that time—that he received a citation and the *Croix de Guerre*. I remembered that although his machine had been riddled with bullets, putting his engine out of commission, he had been lucky enough to get back to his own lines with nothing worse than one of the bones of his left fore-arm splintered; nothing serious, but sufficient to put him *hors de combat* for a few weeks. He had returned to America to spend his enforced holiday with his half-sister and her husband ("big Tom" Cogan, the Editor of the Manhattan Short Story Magazine); a couple well known in this little town of Malvern, and so highly esteemed that the community felt the blow that had fallen on the editor and his wife as being almost personal; as if the misfortune had come to one of their own kith and kin.

The metropolitan newspapers at the time were full of Waller's exploit; which was the latest of a series of what appeared to normal men as foolhardy ventures. "Crazy Waller," and "The Crazy Kid," his pals in the aviation squadron had nicknamed him, and the sobriquets seemed well deserved; for even in his college days he, so it seemed, sought opportunities to do the most foolhardy and dangerous "stunts," which, strange to say, he generally carried out successfully. He laughingly told me, later on, that the seemingly impossible things are really the easiest to do, for the simple reason—so he claimed—that men, thinking they are impossible, do not provide the means for pre-

venting their accomplishment; which bit of philosophy (unless I miss my guess) he got from a certain well-known adventurer—a soldier of fortune—whose feet had scraped the brass foot-rail, and whose face was familiar to every bartender, in every drinking place on Broadway. I surmise that it was really Jack Waller's modest way of minimizing his own daring. Be that as it may: his career during his college days had made him such a conspicuous and popular figure on Broadway and in the various clubs, that when he arrived here from France the newspapers wrote him up in great style; heralded him as America's premier ace, and featured him lavishly in the photogravure section of the Sunday Supplements.

At an age—twenty years old—when a little extra conceit of one's personality and ability may be expected, and forgiven—especially after such prowess as he had shown,—his outstanding characteristics were his modest bearing and absence of "swank;" which was rather astonishing after all the adulation showered on him. Indeed, the more encomiums he received, the more modest and retiring he became.

When I met and got to know him later on, those were the traits that impressed me more than anything else in his character. There seemed to be a depth in his nature that, as I surmised, he himself had not fathomed; a certain stratum, as it were, which had been only slightly cognized; a strange streak of mysticism—a vein of pure gold in the common clay—hidden away from his everyday acquaintances, which was uncovered only now and then to those nearest and dearest to him.

So far as his appearance was concerned he was

not different from hundreds of other college men of athletic proclivities, and duplicates of him could be easily found in any of our colleges and universities; especially among the men given to playing football, in which game Waller was a star performer.

Clean cut, about six feet two inches, built on the lines of a greyhound, lithe as a panther, he was a good specimen of the type popular illustrators and fashion advertisement designers take as representative of the ideal young American—full of high-strung, nervous energy; full of "pep" and "ginger," as one of the newspaper "write-up" artists phrased it.

A bundle of whipcord and nerves, he certainly looked trained to the minute, and carried himself with the easy grace of the athlete. His tanned face, thinned almost to bone and sinew, indicated a high order of mentality; belonging, as the phrenologists would say, to the mental-motive temperament. From under straight dark brows, grey eyes that had fearlessly faced death in various guises looked out frankly and unwaveringly, with an occasional gleam of the high adventurous spirit behind them. A finely modelled nose with sensitive nostrils, a firm lipped mouth, and an over-protuberant chin completed his face; which, usually, was as impassive as an Indian's—due to his hair-raising experiences at the front,—and which gave him an air of reserve power much beyond his years.

And this was the young fellow I had seen from the drug-store window, walking between two officers of the law!

Life, certainly, is full of surprises—I reflected. It seemed strange indeed that this young man, only a

short time ago acclaimed and applauded as a national hero who had given his fighting ability to the service of others and their liberty, should now be fighting for his own life and liberty; fighting against the accusation of having committed a premeditated, cold-blooded murder. It seemed incredible!

Considering his national fame and popularity, it was not to be wondered at that his innocence should be proclaimed, and in no uncertain voice, by all who knew him or only knew of him; and the progress of the case was watched day after day not only by his fellow countrymen but by hundreds in the far-flung battle line in Europe. Everyone, from the highest to the lowest, hoped for his acquittal but . . . and it was a big BUT . . . *there was the damning evidence!*

❧

During the following year, my wife and I got quite chummy with the Cogans.

Through an order I received to make some illustrations for the magazine of which Cogan was the editor, I met "big Tom" more frequently than before, for he would run up to my place at noon and we would have a quiet luncheon in the cozy French restaurant around the corner, afterwards returning to my studio; he to smoke a cigar while watching me making my little pastel color schemes for my posters; he "chewing the rag"—as *he* laughingly put it—while I slaved to pay for my landlord's gasoline,—as *I* grimly put it.

During these chats in which we aired our respective opinions on everything under the sun,—from the low state of art and literature to the high cost of graft to the "common peepul;" from philosophy to the latest exposure of our politicians,—we discovered that we were kindred spirits in more ways than one.

When the pressure of work, which frequently kept me in the studio night after night, eased up a bit, my wife and I took advantage of the lull to visit the Cogans' home in answer to a long-standing and pressing invitation. There we were introduced to Mrs. Cogan and their little boy, Harold, a cute little shaver of about five years of age, with a mop of golden hair framing a chubby face which seemed to be always smiling at something hidden away in his own little noddle. It was easily seen that the child held his mother's heart in his little plump hands, and that she was—as she confessed—simply crazy over the boy.

My wife and Mrs. Cogan took to each other immediately (which was all the more strange as my wife dislikes women intensely; her favorite expression regarding her own sex being, "I'm glad I don't have to marry a woman!"), and, when after our first visit and we were leaving for our own bungalow, one of the party remarked that it did not seem like meeting for the first time; we all seemed to be old friends who, after a separation, had again met and were having a reunion.

"Yes indeed it does," Mrs. Cogan averred. "Don't you think so?" she asked, turning to my wife.

The sharer of my joys and sorrows made a significant *moue* at me, then held up a warning finger to Mrs. Cogan.

"Don't start this man off, please," she advised, gently pushing me toward the door. "The subject of reincarnation is his particular hobby, his pet obsession; and if you give him half a chance he will stay here all night telling you what he knows of his former lives and what he went through in ancient Egypt, Greece, and . . . where else did you live, Jack?" The last bit with a grin at me.

"Is that so?" Mrs. Cogan asked with a smile of delighted surprise on her face. "Well, that *is* good news; for, do you know, although I must confess I used to think all that was due to a superheated imagination, certain things and incidents have made me change my viewpoint; and now I am not only interested but want to find out all I can about it. So . . ." turning to me with a glad smile, "when you have the time to spare, and the inclination to add to my fund of information, do not hesitate to start the ball arolling. You appear to be an eminently sane person, so make the date soon; you will be as welcome as the flowers of spring."

It does not often happen that I get a chance to laugh at my wife's expense, so this time I took full advantage of the opportunity. Woman-like she had to have the last word, and so got back at me with:

"All right, but don't say I didn't warn you. When I am kept awake with one of my nervous headaches I generally ask him a question about one of his past lives; that's all that is necessary to start him off, and in a few minutes I am fast asleep. It is one of the finest soporifics I know; beats sulphonal or trional hollow."

As we had to get home sometime, I had to content

myself with "big Tom's" hearty slap on my shoulder and his stage whisper, "'A prophet is not without honor' —— you know, old chappie," followed by a handshake and his famous booming laugh; a laugh which in resonance would do credit to a foghorn!

Our acquaintance soon ripened into a close friendship, and it was only natural that the tragedy should come into the conversation.

I gathered from Cogan (and also from Tracy, the short-story writer) some of the data of the circumstances that led up to the killing of Benton; which, combined with what Mrs. Cogan told my wife in their heart-to-heart talks—things that did not come out in the trial, helped me to piece most of the story together, but not all. There were blank spots in the narrative which needed filling in, but none of the principals could give me any aid in the matter; for the simple reason they did not know how. Even Tracy could do but little in that direction, as he had only the impressionable temperament of the psychic without the analytical training of the occultist.

One afternoon, Cogan and Tracy came to my studio to talk over some illustrations I was making for a story the latter had written for Cogan's magazine. An argument arose over some detail or other, I forget just what,—some trifle in the background of one of the drawings,—and to convince Cogan that he was wrong I looked for the book in which I had found my data. As often happens in a busy man's studio, especially an illustrator's—mine at all events—where in the rush of working under pressure things are for the time thrown higgledy-piggledy (a costume over the back of a chair, the lounge crowded with boots,

leggings, artificial flowers, a suit of khaki, another chair loaded down with books of reference, a rifle and bayonet, and other "props"), I couldn't discover the particular book I wanted. Cogan in his blustery, jovial way offered to help find the book. Giving him a description of its binding, I suggested that he should glance over the books in the bookcase, thinking that by chance it might have been returned to one of the shelves.

"Say, old man," he ejaculated in an astonished voice after a few moments of searching, "are you a Spiritualist?"

"A Spiritualist?" I repeated, taken by surprise by the question. "No, I am not a Spiritualist. What makes you ask?"

"Why . . . all this truck here. I didn't know you went in for this kind of stuff!"

"What the dickens are you raving about, Cogan? What stuff do you mean?" My mind was so full of the work in hand, for the instant I did not grasp the gist of his meaning.

"Why . . . er . . . this stuff! '*Clairvoyance*,' '*Way of Initiation*,' '*Ancient Wisdom*,' '*Occult Science*,' Wow, wow!" he exploded. "Every second book here seems to be on occultism. Great Scott! I didn't know you wasted your valuable time on such humbug."

I saw that Tracy was looking at me inquiringly. He raised his eyebrows with a mute question.

"I can understand old Tracy there having his wheels buzz out of gear once in a while because he is getting old and feeble; but you!" Cogan threw his hands up in mock despair. Then I understood the meaning of Tracy's look.

I laughed at the absurd face Cogan was making. "And why not me?" I countered.

"Because I always took you to be more or less sane; that is . . ." he grinned boyishly, " . . . for an artist."

"And now? — —" I waited for his answer.

"Darned if I know what to think." He scratched his head and winked at Tracy.

"Well, it would take more time than I can spare now to answer your objections; for of course you have studied the subject," I replied with an air of innocence.

"Hm . . . well now . . .er . . . no, I cannot say that I have," he admitted reluctantly.

"That is why, probably, you are so ready to pass judgment on those who have," I replied with a pretended sharpness in my tones. It was my turn to wink at Tracy.

"Oh! say, old chap, I didn't mean to flick you on a raw spot. Good Lord, old man, I wouldn't hurt your feelings for . . ."

"You haven't hurt my feelings," I interrupted, trying to look solemn, "but I dislike hearing a widely read man like you, an editor too, a man who should know that the greatest of our humanity were high priests of that same occultism; men like Lao Tse, Buddha, Plato, Iamblichus, our own Carlyle, Goethe, Emerson, and a bunch of others too numerous to mention. I dislike hearing you make free with an opinion on something you admit you know nothing about."

"That's right," Tracy chimed in gleefully, "throw the hooks into him. He needs someone to tell him a few home truths."

Cogan looked thoughtfully at Tracy a moment, then unceremoniously brushed some props off a chair, and sat down heavily.

"Two to one," he grunted. "I throw up my hands! I must confess that I am as ignorant of the subject as Paddy's pig, but I thought it had to do with those fakers on Sixth Avenue; fortune tellers, Spiritualists, mediums, and all that bosh. Now, as I said before: although you are an artist I know you for a fairly sane citizen, so — —" He waved his hand apologetically.

"I admit that you have some grounds for your mistake," I replied, swinging around from my easel to face him; "but did it ever occur to you that the fakers were palming off on the credulous what was a poor, cheap, base imitation of something that may be true, real, and ennobling?"

"To tell the truth, old fellow, I haven't given it as much thought as perhaps I should have done, and if there is anything real and sincere in this . . . er . . ." ("Rubbish!" Tracy interjected grimly) " . . . in this occult stuff, as you say there is, perhaps . . ." He threw Tracy a significant glance.

Tracy, sensing what Cogan evidently wanted to say, took up the theme.

"I am only at the psychic stage, and totally untrained," he explained with a sigh of regret; "so I haven't my clairvoyant faculty at my command. I have to wait for *my* things."

Which was Tracy's way of saying that clairvoyance in his case, as in that of all untrained psychics, was casual and fortuitous. As I had had the benefit of a training under an advanced occultist, I knew

what a drawback such undeveloped and untrained powers were; and when in the course of our conversation he learned that I possessed the "open sight"—the faculty of trained clairvoyance,—he waxed enthusiastic, and suggested that I should use my powers to look "behind the veil" for the purpose of finding the missing data—the blank spots—in the drama in which Cogan, his wife, and his brother-in-law, Jack Waller, had played such prominent parts.

I looked at Cogan to see what he thought of the suggestion. He glanced quizzingly at Tracy, then at me. I suppose our using words belonging to the technique of clairvoyance which were new and strange to him, (probably sounding like so much gibberish), made him doubt our sincerity; for, after chewing on the end of his cigar awhile, he blurted out:

"Say! What kind of a bunco game are you two jokers trying to put over on me? I am Irish, and I am well aware that the green shows now and then, but"— ("Looks very red to me, sometimes," Tracy edged in)—"but," repeated Cogan, continuing, "I'm perhaps not quite as green as you spalpeens think I am."

Tracy turned to me with a smile of amusement. "Thrying to taake advanthage of a poorr, unprotected orphin. Is thaat your gaame? Shame on your head! How can ye do such a thing?" he quavered in a stagey voice.

"Huh! You won't put anything across on this child," retorted the "orphan;" "not if I see you first."

"We are not trying to put anything over on you," I said in a serious tone. "Furthermore, you are not asked to accept any of *my* statements in a spirit of

blind faith. Indeed, I prefer you sceptical rather than credulous; for believeing too much and too readily is quite as foolish as believing too little. Personally, I think it is worse; for a healthy scepticism and a spirit of inquiry make a man use the little gray matter he possesses by thinking for himself, instead of taking the *ipse dixit* of others who may know no more than he does."

Cogan pulled vigorously at his cigar, pondering. He was on unfamiliar ground with an unfamiliar topic; and while it was apparent that he welcomed the idea of clearing up the mystery of the murder, he wanted to make sure that we were not 'stringing' him—as he put it. He didn't like the thought that he might be ridiculed later on for being an 'easy mark'; that was something his Irish sensitiveness rebelled against.

"Well now, honest to goodness," he began in a serious tone, looking suspiciously at me from under his shaggy eyebrows, "do you mean to say that you and old Tracy here can see things that . . . er . . . that I and other folks cannot see—astral bodies, spooks, and such like?"

"As I explained: I am untrained—" Tracy began, but Cogan would not be headed off.

"Assuming for the sake of argument that there is another world, better or worse than this—heaven or hell, call it what you like,—assuming there is a place where people go to when they die; do you mean to say that you can see, feel, hear, or otherwise get in touch with those people? The ones we call 'dead'?"

"So far as I am concerned, because I cannot answer for Tracy, that is just exactly what I mean to say," I replied definitely.

"You claim to be able to see and talk to those dead persons?" he persisted.

"Those whom you call 'dead' are more alive than we are! Having been released from their heavy physical bodies, they are freer and very much more alive than we are. The old Greek philosophers said we who lived on this earth in physical bodies were really the dead ones (*hoi neckroi*); and I claim, in all seriousness, to be able to see and converse with those whom you call 'dead.'"

"Rubbish! Rubbish!" he exploded.

I looked over at Tracy, but he was lolling back in his chair; his eyes closed; a smile on his face. Silently I drew Cogan's attention to the smile, and said:

"If a million Cogans yelled 'rubbish' so loudly that it could be heard at the other side of the globe, old Tracy would still have that seraphic smile on his face. Do you know *why*, Cogan?"

He grinned boyishly when I put the question to him.

"Probably the old fraud is thinking out another story to plant on me, and so pay his back rent." His shoulders shook with laughter.

"Come now," I begged, "be serious and answer my question. Do you know why?"

"The good Lord may know, but I don't. What's the answer?"

"Tracy would still smile, partly at your ignorance, but more particularly because *he knows*," I retorted. "'Fools deride,'" I quoted, "'but philosophers investigate.'"

He was silent for a few moments, then pulled out his watch to see how much time he could spare.

"Oh well, I may as well make a day of it," he said finally, making himself comfortable in his chair. "Go ahead and enlighten my ignorance. I'm open to conviction. Shoot!"

"Big Tom" Cogan—as his intimates called him, like most busy men of the world, had time only for the things within his ken; things bounded by the horizon of his everyday, work-a-day life; things that affected him immediately. His waking moments were full of intense activity (a victim of the American vice of trying to crowd tomorrow's work into today), and when he had a breathing spell, he was so tired that he felt —as he said—like sleeping for a week. Being an editor, he had to keep abreast of the times; consequently, he read almost everything he could lay his hands on. Every now and then he would come across an article, essay, or critique dealing with spiritualistic phenomena, such as alleged messages from the dead, and other happenings purporting to be of a super-normal origin. If written by an author unknown to him, he would pass it by unread with a good-natured contempt for the ones who wasted their time reading such twaddle. If it was by Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes, Camille Flammarion, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, or other well-known man, he would read it as a matter of duty; but he rarely got anything of value or lasting benefit from the perusal, because his critical faculty, would, sooner or later, be busy picking out faults

in the form, typography, or grammar, calling to his aid a blue pencil with which to correct the punctuation and other errors.

It was a standing joke in his home! His wife always knew when he had read any book or magazine article by finding the pages blue-pencilled. Unfortunately for him, the habit had become so much a part of his nature, he missed the real essentials through giving undue importance to the things that did not matter much.

That is true, worse luck, of most of us! In that respect nearly all of us are "Cogans"—full of the spirit of criticism. We miss the beauty of the statue because we see only the fly-marks; we forget the grandeur of the enterprise in our zeal to show up the weaknesses; the nobility of a soul in a hand-me-down suit goes unrecognized by the tailor; the message is pigeonholed because it is not written in the conventional style; a truly spiritual man may be branded "atheist" because he does not attend a church; a great love laid on the altar of sacrifice is frowned on and deemed sinful because the lovers neglected to cross the palm of a clergyman with a five dollar bill.

The majority of humans usually see and give great importance only to the non-essentials of life, thereby missing many of the things that really count. Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' applies to us today as much as it did to the people of his day. We are so engrossed and enamoured with the shadows thrown on the screen of time, shadows that are transitory and unstable, that we fail to see or recognize the verities of life. The politician sees only the place; not the opportunity to serve. The money-grabber thinks the possession of

wealth the end; not the means to reach the desired goal of happiness—by using his money for lightening the burdens on weak shoulders. And . . . but let us get to the story.

Cogan was a specimen of a type only too common. What he could not understand, or did not have first-hand knowledge of, he pooh-poohed and waved aside as an aberration of an incompetent mind, or smiled indulgently at it as one of the harmless fads of the hour.

He confessed that that had been his attitude up to the time when the murder of Benton almost tore his home-circle asunder, and threatened to throw a lasting dark shadow over the lives of those he loved most dearly; but later on, when the case took such a sudden and strange turn, he was brought a trifle closer to the realities—the verities of life, and was, consequently, more disposed to accept the possibility of there being "something in it;"—the super-normal side of the matter.

At the end of our conversation, which took up most of the remainder of the afternoon, he completely changed his attitude, and welcomed Tracy's suggestion that I use my clairvoyant faculty to clear up the mystery.

"Say, old man," he remarked when he was going, "let me know how much I am to cough up for all this trouble I am giving you."

I laughed, and asked him. "Do you mean how much money?"

He nodded. "Sure, Mike; for of course I cannot expect you to do it for nothing! As my boss knows to

his sorrow when your bills come in, your time is worth money; so if you'll say . . ."

"That is where you are mistaken. The real spiritual clairvoyant faculty is rarely or never used except in a good cause, and for a good purpose; consequently, the user of that faculty does not sell his powers for money or anything else. Indeed, he retains his powers on the condition that they are used unselfishly and for the benefit of humanity; the moment they are used for personal selfish gain, that moment marks the beginning of the speedy loss of those powers and faculty. You can always use that fact as a test when having anything to do with a real clairvoyant, or . . . the imitation."

"But what about the 'laborer being worthy of his hire'?"

"The clairvoyant reaps his reward in the form of more power and extended vision with which to give more help to his fellows who need helping," I answered.

Cogan looked nonplussed for a moment. "Huh, kind of stumps me, that does! I am so used to having people trying to gouge me, that your proposition sort of catches me off my base."

"Something new in your experience, eh?" I said to give him a chance to recover his normal equanimity. I knew that "Big Tom" with his big generous heart would rather be on the giver's end than on the receiver's. He nodded absently to my question; then found his voice.

"You shall have my very sincere thanks, anyhow," shaking my hand vigorously, "for the whole business is certainly queer, to say the least; and I must admit

that the hypothesis of 'coincidence' doesn't seem to cover the case."

Using certain methods, well known to every trained occultist, I carefully went over the whole matter, and the result of my investigations behind the veil was the completion of the story in all its details.

When I had gathered all the data I suggested that Tracy ought to write the full story; for, being a literary man, a professional writer with all the tricks of the craft at his command, I felt that he was the proper man to do it; but he was very decided in his refusal. The very considerations I advanced to induce him to write the story were, in his opinion, the strongest arguments against the proposition.

"I honestly think"—Tracy said—"that such a narrative will be of value to those who desire to know of conditions after death (and who isn't interested in such a vital topic?), and any lack of literary ability will, if anything, be in your favor. If I wrote it, the style of the professional writer would be so obvious, it would be taken for fiction. That is just the fault with most books written on the subject; they are so well written they do not sound genuine, but merely works of imagination."

"Yes, I agree with you on that point," I interrupted.

"Besides, you *know* these things and can correlate them with physical plane phenomena, whereas I . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders with an air of regret.

"But, my dear fellow," I responded, thinking with a sinking heart of my other work—work that meant my bread and butter, "I don't know a blessed thing about making books; I'd hardly know how or where to start. Then . . . the question of 'style'! why . . ."

"Style!" he snorted contemptuously. "The less you know of style in this connection, the better your story will be."

"Now if it called for painting a picture," I hedged, "why—I would feel more at home; but . . ."

"All right," Tracy broke in, "think of the various incidents as pictures, and describe them . . . in writing."

That was the end of our discussion. Tracy threw the whole business on my shoulders, and considered the matter settled!

Lacking the writer's training, I have tried to tell the story in a straight-forward fashion, hoping that my readers will find it—and the moral it teaches—interesting enough to disregard any deficiencies of literary quality.

To make the whole thing clear, it is necessary to go back for a period of about four or five weeks previous to the trial, and to take the incidents as nearly as possible in chronological order. The only additions I have attempted are the descriptions of the actors in the tragedy, so that the reader may more clearly see the *reasons* for the *causes* of the *effects;* the working out of what Emerson calls "The Law of Compensation;" what the occultist calls "The Law of Karma."

THE STORY.

Tom Cogan or, to give him the name by which he is best known in the magazine world, Big Tom Cogan, —"big" because he is big not only in a physical but more especially in a spiritual sense—big-souled and big-hearted,—Big Tom Cogan was seated at his desk, doing his daily stint as Editor of the *Manhattan Short Story Magazine;* attending to the thousand and one things that crowd an editor's life, making him gray-haired and nervous before his time; in between times reading manuscripts of short stories; interrupted by persons with axes to grind, and who should have never got past the office boy; his eye caught sight of the calendar, and he remembered that this was the day that Hamilton, the artist, had faithfully promised to deliver the drawings for the "feature" story—*The Workers*—of the forthcoming issue.

Turning to his "sub," Cogan asked: "Say, Ted, has Hamilton brought in his drawings for *The Workers* yet?"

Ted Curran, the sub-editor and general utility man, attended to the numerous details connected with the "make-up" of the magazine: the ordering of the plates for the illustrations; keeping tab on the contributions—literary and artistic—that were ac-

cepted by his chief; doing everything in short that could lessen the load on Big Tom's overloaded shoulders.

Adjusting the large tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles which enlarged his bright blue eyes, and revealed the whimsical humor that always seemed to lurk in them, he swung round on his chair to refer to a large card on the wall, on which he kept track of the contributors to each monthly issue—his "make-up" guide; or, as he preferred to call it, his "race-track dope."

"Not yet, he hasn't," he replied cheerfully. "'Ham' is running true to form. A very consistent performer. Can always depend on him being two or three days late. I'm 'fraid Ham'll never bring home the bacon." He sniggerd at his own pun.

Cogan snorted impatiently, grabbed the 'phone, and called the artist's number.

"Durn his hide," he muttered, waiting for the connection. "I'll bet my old shoes he is lolling on that lounge of his, strumming ragtime jazz on his guitar." Getting a response from the artist at the other end of the wire, he said in a weary tone: "Say, Tintoretto, how are those drawings coming on? You promised them for today. How about it?"

The artist's answer evoked a grim smile from Cogan as he announced into the phone his intention of calling on the artist that evening, to see for himself just how near the drawings were to completion. He was about to hang up the receiver when a question from the artist made him lean back, his shoulders shaking with unconcealed mirth. In a voice broken with laughter, he replied: "Why do I call you 'Tintoretto'? Because Tintoretto always made it a point to keep his

promises . . . ahead of time!" He hung up the receiver, muttering with a grin, "That'll hold you for a while—you lazy scamp."

Hearing Ted sniggering behind him, he turned to remark:

"Ted, my boy, literary men are bad enough, but these illustrators are the limit!"

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Ted. "I guess it's six of one and half a dozen of t'other. There isn't very much to choose between them, so far as I can see."

"He says he is working like a slave on the drawings," said Cogan, ironically. "Like a slave! The lazy rip!"

Ted smiled; it was an old, old story to him as also to his chief. "He ought to paint a portrait of himself doing the slave stunt; make a fine frontispiece for *The Workers* story," he suggested, grinning. "You might pass the idea on to him; see what he thinks of the notion. 'Slaving' listens good," he continued; "but the only time he does any slaving is when he plays chess with Kelly, his next door neighbor. Kelly makes him slave all right, all right."

His chief looked up from a manuscript, surprised. "Chess? I didn't know he played chess. Didn't know he could keep his mind on one thing long enough."

"Play chess? Huh!" Ted grunted. "Why, with those two fellows it's a case of 'if chess interferes with your business, give up your business.' It amounts to an obsession with them. Every time I land at his studio they are hard at it, trying the *Rice* gambit, the *Cheese* gambit, or some other opening with an outlandish name. Chess? Well, I should smile!"

Cogan gave a grunt of annoyance. "Confound him and his chess! I wanted to get those drawings to the engravers this afternoon, so as to leave me free to-morrow morning."

"By Jove; that's so!" exclaimed Ted. "I'd forgotten that your brother-in-law's ship is due tomorrow. I suppose Mrs. Cogan is tickled to death having her brother return a hero."

"You can bet she is," smiled Cogan; "and so am I. And say, Ted, you ought to see that kid of mine! The little scamp hasn't had a full night's sleep since his mother told him that his Uncle Jack is coming home." He beamed happily, as though—in his mind's eye—he saw the happy meeting of the boy and his uncle.

"Yes, sir," he continued, his eyes twinkling, "it feels good to have a blooming 'ero in one's family. I am feeling the effect already. So many people are so much more cordial than usual; makes me feel quite chesty!"

"Shining by reflected light, as it were," suggested Ted.

The editor nodded, and grinned happily.

If Cogan and Ted, his sub, could have seen Hamilton the artist "slaving" on his drawings, they would have lost their bets. True, he was lolling on his lounge as Cogan surmised; but he wasn't playing the guitar, nor was he playing chess. He had something

new to hold his attention, and to give him an excuse for "bumming"—as he jocularly termed his wasting of valuable daylight.

His model, dressed in the shabby costume of one of the characters in his drawings, was sitting cross-legged on a cushion at the side of a tabouret on which was a sheet of stiff drawing paper. On the paper was a triangular-shaped piece of thin wood, raised from the paper at two of its corners by pegs; the third corner held, in lieu of peg, a lead pencil. It was a "planchette," an article well known in circles given to spiritualistic phenomena. The model rested the fingers of her hand lightly on the surface of the planchette, with the result that the board moved in a more or less erratic fashion over the paper; the pencil writing what was, to the ordinary person, a meaningless scrawl, but which, to the initiated, was a message written by the agency of invisible spiritual entities.

This was a new "stunt" to Hamilton; and, instead of working at his drawings, he was engrossed in watching the planchette write.

"Aw, say!" he burst out, after watching the performance for some minutes, "you can't fool me, kid! You are making it write yourself," he accused, with a fine disregard for grammar.

"I am not, Mr. Hamilton," the model replied indignantly. "Just you try it, then you'll see for yourself."

He was about to do so when the telephone call from Cogan reminded him of his promise to have the drawings completed.

"Come on, kid; we've got to get to work. That was the main gazabo yelling for these drawings; and he'll be up tonight to see them. Come on, let's get busy."

Going to his easel, and after lighting a fresh cigarette, he started sharpening his charcoal. The model dragged herself very reluctantly from the communion with her alleged spirit friends, and, having mounted the model's "throne," took the required pose.

A couple of hours later, Cogan's labors were interrupted by his wife who, having put in the afternoon shopping in the city, had come to accompany her husband to their home in the suburbs.

"Hello! Good afternoon, everybody," was her greeting. "Overworking yourselves, as usual?"

Ted, the sub-editor, chuckled. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Cogan," he answered her smiling nod. "Overworking is correct, all right."

She went to her husband who, sitting back in his swivel chair, was reading "copy" and uttering maledictions in between puffs of his half-smoked cigar. Sliding her arm around his shoulder and kissing him fondly, she noticed his annoyed expression. Leaning so that he could see her face, and imitating his frowning expression, she made a grimace of amusement.

"Now what is troubling my big boy?" she quizzed. "Author, artist, or advertiser? I know it must be one of the three; probably a combination of them all. Eh?"

"Oh, hang it! These fellows will drive me into an early grave; that is sure," was his disgusted response.

Mrs. Cogan laughed merrily. "Never mind, boysie. Cheerup; tomorrow's another day." She rubbed the

top of his head playfully. "Come along, time's up! Get your hat, Tom, and we will make the 5.50 train and forget all our worries." She leaned down to speak into his ear; then in a stage whisper, "We shall have your favorite dessert—custard!"

He heaved a sigh. "Sorry, Kitty, but I can't do it. I have to run up to Hamilton's studio this evening to hurry along some drawings he's making for us."

She gave a gesture of disappointment. "Pst! Just my luck! And after all the trouble I took to make it."

Cogan puffed vigorously on his half-chewed cigar and frowned. "As if I haven't enough to do as it is," he growled. "Confound Hamilton; the lazy scamp!"

His wife patted his shoulder soothingly, and tried to hide her disappointment.

He glanced up at her face, and saw that she was biting her lip. His own face brightened as a thought occurred to him.

"Why not stay and have dinner in town with me? We need not stay long at Ham's; then we can go home together." He reached up and pressed her hand. "The custard can wait until we get home. You know I can do full justice to it however late it is. What do you say?"

She gave his hand an answering squeeze, and smiled happily.

Her eyes, suspiciously moist, brightened at the suggestion with its promise of being with her husband; for, as she often said: half the time she didn't know she had a husband, what with him working overtime on the magazine, or else shut up in his study at home, writing plays. Every now and then she would expostu-

late with him, complaining that she might as well be living in a boarding house, or be a grass widow, and would beg to see a little more of him, to give her a little more of his company; which would lead to a tiff, the only tiffs they had, and it would generally end up with his retorting that when they were lying side by side in their wooden suits, they would have nothing to do but gaze at the stars and make love to each other; while now—he had all he could do to provide for her and their boy, Harold.

"You know, Kitty, it is quite possible that a brick or a shingle may fall off one of these jerry-built joints and land on my defenceless "bean;" or I may get run over by a careless freight train, or put in a hospital by a giddy chauffeur trying to side-swipe me in pure joy of showing off his skill; or I may get ptomaine poisoning from eating beef fresh from a six months' sojourn in the cold storage warehouse, and . . . I don't exactly like the idea of you and the kiddie having to depend on charity."

His semi-humorous sallies, accompanied by a hug, would always put a stop to her complaints; and the argument would always end with her throwing her arms around his neck, and calling herself selfish. She often wondered what on earth she should do if she ever lost her big husband, and the reference to their child—the "kid"—invariably brought the discussion to an abrupt end; for she worshipped the very ground he trod on. Together, they were the centre of her universe; also the circumference thereof.

Being of a strong, passionate nature, love to her meant *possession.* She could not understand the love

that spelled *renunciation*. Such a love, to her, seemed weakness. She was of the type that would fight like a tigress for the possession of her loved one. Intensely loyal to those who had won her heart, she would go through fire and water for them. And sometimes, in the excess of her love emotion, her arms tightly wound around her husband, pressing him to her heaving bosom, she would whisper through her clinched teeth: "You dear, big brute! I wish I could squeeze you small enough to put you in the innermost recess of my heart, so that I might have you with me all the time; for all eternity, never more to be parted."

So it was with a glad heart and beaming face that she welcomed her husband's suggestion of dining together.

"All right, boysie; that will be fine," she whispered, pressing a passionate kiss on his forehead. "You better 'phone home to tell Maggie, so that she and Harold can have their dinner, and not wait for us."

Cogan nodded assent, glad that the little cloud was dissipated, and called the 'phone number of his house.

"I suppose we'll have to wait half an hour for the connection; the service is awful nowadays," he remarked with a grunt. "Seems as if all the girls are doing war work of some sort or other, so they are short-handed at . . . ." He heard the servant's voice coming over the wire . . . "Oh! hello; is that you, Maggie? This is Mr. Cogan. Your mistress will have dinner with me in town this evening, so you and Harold go ahead and have dinner. No, we shall not be late . . . What's that?" He laughed. "All right, I'll hold the wire." He turned to his wife. "Maggie says Harold

is there . . . wants to speak to us; the little scallawag." He turned back to the 'phone when he heard his boy's lisp. "Hello, sonny . . . I don't know about that . . . well, wait a moment and you can ask your mumsie." He smiled as he gave the receiver to his wife. "The kiddie wants to stay up until we get home. Tell him 'yes.' We'll cut our visit at Hamilton's as short as possible."

Mrs. Cogan rested her arm on the desk, and cooed into the phone: "Hello, Mumsie's kiddlums . . . . Yes, I can hear you, darling . . . . . Oh, no, dearie, Uncle Jack hasn't come yet . . . . no, tomorrow morning, sweetheart . . . No, we shall not be late . . . yes, you may stay up until we come home, but be a very, *very* good boy, and do as Maggie tells you, won't you? . . . . . Goodbye, here is a kiss for you over the phone . . . . Goodbye, Mumsie's kiddlums."

Cogan was close enough to the receiver to hear the child's prattle. His eyes were moist as he looked into the face of his wife. She caught his glance, and—understood. She pressed his hand lovingly. Their cup of happiness was full and overflowing.

II

The smoking room of the ocean liner, *La Republique*, was not so crowded as it had been on other evenings of the voyage. The peculiar unrest of American passengers when nearing their destination was manifest on this the evening before the liner was due to arrive at New York. Some of the male passengers were outside on the decks enjoying the magnificent moonlit night; some, of course, were in certain shady nooks, exchanging vows and other small talk with some of the opposite sex; others were lounging in the corridors, listening to the music coming from the main saloon.

At the card-tables were the usual card fiends who seemed to regard life merely as an opportunity to play poker or pinochle; they, like the poor and the tax-gatherer, are always in evidence. At this particular time their enjoyment was marred by the loud talk and raucous laugh of a middle-aged, half-tipsy man sitting at one of the other tables, and who insisted on making himself the centre of attraction by amusing his immediate neighbors—who had nothing better to do—with his coarse witticisms, and opinions on almost every topic under the sun.

The man was Karl Benton; actor, man of the world, and, formerly, a Broadway matinée idol. Of mixed par-

entage, he claimed the United States as his home; to which he was now returning after an extended tour of five years around the world.

Although his fat, blotched face with its baggy, leering eyes bore witness to the dissipated life he had led, one could not fail to see that he must have been strikingly handsome in the days when he made his first hit, and took the metropolitan theatre-going public by storm. His brilliant, dark eyes still held the imperious seductive look that had quickened the heart-beats of his feminine worshippers, and had made him the recipient of gushing love-letters written by women of all sorts and conditions between the two coasts. His photograph as *Romeo* graced many an elegant boudoir, while his admirers who could not afford the luxury of a photograph, offered up the incense of their adoration to half-tone pictures cut out of the magazines and Sunday newspapers.

During the voyage, he had spent most of his time gracefully allowing himself to be lionized by the women on board; holding them enthralled—for he was a fascinating *raconteur*—with the accounts of his experiences with royalty, and other great ones of the world. His conversation was enhanced by the employment of all the oratorical tricks of the actor, and the suavity of the travelled cosmopolite who had been the lion of London and Paris drawing-rooms; the hero of many love affairs with ladies of high position in both hemispheres.

This evening, however, the women folk felt sentimental along other lines.

Someone had started the ball rolling by playing

Way down upon the Suwanee River from a book of *Popular Home Melodies,* and it had developed into what Benton sneeringly snubbed a "damned, snivelling, revival meeting!" Finding that his star had set for that evening—so far as the women were concerned, Benton had tried to find some male companion who would listen to the recital of his exploits; but without success. The men had no desire to be bored with his egotism; besides, they had heard so much of and from him, they had no wish to hear more. He turned for solace to the ship's bar, seeking consolation for his offended *amour propre* in numerous highballs, and the company of the bartender; but even the dispenser of drinks who, at other times, had—as a matter of business courtesy—listened to his "song and dance" (as he contemptuously termed the celebrated actor's account of himself and his doings), was so fed up that he excused his inattention by saying he was too busy making up his accounts. Finally, he drifted into the smoking-room, hoping to find some who, like himself, found time hanging heavily on their hands. He had imbibed more alcohol than usual—which was saying a great deal, and at this particular time of his advent in the smoking-room had reached the stage where his sense of discretion was not so keen as it should have been.

His present audience was not a large one, but what it lacked in numbers, it made up in evident enjoyment of the risque stories that flowed in a steady stream from his, apparently, inexhaustible store; which developed in coarseness as he proceeded. The card players were not at all pleased to have his raucous laugh break in on their games, and more than once they muttered

curses on him and his dirty tales. They were not the only ones to feel displeased at his intrusion.

Jack Waller had welcomed the comparative quiet of the smoking-room as an opportunity to smoke a cigar in peace, without being pestered to talk about his experiences in the war. His left arm—which had been broken during one of his reconnoitering trips by the bullet of a Boche airman, and now in splints—had been giving him some sharp twinges, and now he was glad to be able to rest it on the arm of his chair while he smoked in comfort, and listened to the faint sounds of the "Home Melodies," which fitted in perfectly with his present mood.

When Benton started telling his stories, Jack had tried to ignore his presence, hoping that either the actor or the listeners would get tired and go elsewhere; but when story followed story, each worse than the preceding one and delivered in a loud, carrying voice that could be heard all over the room, Jack began to get restless. As the actor's accounts of his dealings with the fair sex began to be more detailed, and took on a more lurid and salacious coloring, Jack's ears began to tingle, and his jaws came together with an ominous set. The stories were quite bad enough, but when the actor recounted some of his experiences with women who were wives of men at the front, and mothers of families, Jack felt that his limit of endurance was reached. He glanced once or twice toward the group at Benton's table, wondering what kind of cattle they were, to sit and not only listen to, but enjoy the abominable talk that flowed from Benton's lips. One of the men, seemingly, had arrived at his limit of indecency, for he took

advantage of a lull to remark that he, for one, would be glad to get on land again.

"So shall I," agreed another of the group. "I sure will be glad to see my little woman again. I haven't seen her for over six months, and I guess she'll be glad to welcome her hubby."

Benton looked at the speaker with a bleary look of contempt; then laughed in a metallic, parrot-like cackle.

"That's a long time to be away from a dear, loving wife. Pretty risky, isn't it? I wouldn't trust *my* wife that length of time!"

The man to whom Benton spoke waved his hand deprecatingly.

"My wife isn't that kind of woman," he said, pulling down his vest with a self-satisfied air. "I could trust her anywhere and at any time."

"So?" Benton sneered "Hmff! Your wife is one in ten thousand! Where did you find her? In an asylum for the deaf, dumb, and blind? Or perhaps she's a cripple!"

A frown came over the man's face. He didn't quite like the trend of the conversation; it was becoming a trifle too personal for even his dull wit. Seeing an opportunity to turn the laugh on to Benton, he grunted pointedly, "Perhaps *your* married life has been unfortunate. What did she do; run away with another feller?"

The actor looked at him in well-feigned amazement.

"Do you mean me?" he flashed, putting his much-diamonded fingers gracefully on his breast. "Ho, ho, ho! That's a great joke! The best I've heard in a long while," he laughed uproariously. "Gad! I was

never fool enough to marry any woman. Why should I when I can borrow other men's wives?"

His listeners glanced at each other in disapproval of such talk.

"Oh! say, say!" protested one; "that's going too far! You must remember some of us are married."

"More fools they," droned Benton, with a curl of his thin lips.

Jack could stand it no longer. Striding to where Benton sat, his first impulse was to punch his jaw; but when he saw that the actor was more than half drunk, he changed his mind and looked at him contemptuously.

Benton, of course, had heard all about Jack's heroism from the women on board; they, as Jack had kept himself aloof, had had to content themselves with worshipping him from a distance, and discussing his exploits with the other passengers, Benton included. The actor, too, was jealous of anyone who, consciously or unconsciously, encroached on the spotlight of popularity which he considered belonged to him alone. He looked up at Jack's grim, set face with the quick realization that he was no match in his present drunken condition for this young giant; but the sight of the wounded arm resting in its bandage assured him that there was nothing to fear on that score. He surmised that any encounter with Jack would be one merely of wits,—a talk-fest, as he inwardly said to himself,—so, with an air of composure, he looked up at Jack when the latter remarked witheringly:

"Evidently, you have never met any women worth knowing—judging from your talk. You don't seem to have a very high, or flattering opinion of them."

The actor, amused, drew himself up, and struck a tragic pose; as though he were declaiming a favorite line.

"My dear young fellow. I love *all* women, all women worth knowing; especially the *married* ones." Then with a delicate gesture of his hand to give point to his remark: "*They* know how to keep their mouths shut, and keep their own counsel." He waved his jewelled hand with an air of finality.

Jack's lips came together in a straight line, and his fist shut tightly; but sensing the fact that the bloated lump of conceit was a coward at heart, he repressed the impulse to strike him.

A couple of the men at the table shuffled out of their seats, as though ashamed to be found in such company.

"I feel sorry for you," said Jack, staring coldly into the actor's eyes. "A man of your age ought to have a little more decency. If you had been where I have just come from. . . ."

Benton, not being disposed to play second fiddle by being put on the defensive, cut in with: "Pardon me, I haven't the—uh—*honour* or—uh—pleasure of your acquaintance, so—" adjusting his monocle carefully, he looked up at Jack as if he were a specimen of some new and curious species, . . . "where *have* you just come from, my young Sir Galahad?"

"I have come from a place where I have seen better men than you will ever be," he began in a cold, even tone. "Men torn by shrapnel and bullets, parts of their splendid bodies blown away, their lungs corroding from the effects of poison-gas, going through a hell of pain

and agony; in an atmosphere fetid with the smell of stale blood, and the odor of surgical dressings. Those men were attended to and nursed by well bred, nurtured women who, although at the limit of their endurance and at the point of collapse through want of proper rest and food, kept on, like the ministering angels they are, trying to lessen the agony of the wounded."

The card-players stopped their games, as if by common consent, to listen to Jack describing the scene he seemed to visualize before him.

"How very interesting!" Benton drawled with a cynical smile. "God bless the dear little girls."

Jack did not heed the interruption. His eyes took on a faraway look, as though he again saw the incidents happening.

"One scene I shall never forget! It had been pouring a deluge of rain, sleet and hail for three days, with an icy wind cutting one's flesh to the bone. Thousands of shells bursting all around us; hell let loose! By sheer weight of numbers the enemy was forcing us back—a retreat. We were marching, stumbling, dog-tired and spent—literally asleep on our feet—over a road that was shell-holes and morasses of mud. We brought the wounded in with us as best we could. A procession of tired soldiers acting as bearers are bringing in men—the wounded and dying. Awaiting them in the cold downpour, their faces raw from the effects of the bitter wind, their feet sunk in the mire, their clothes soaked and caked with mud, are two Sisters of Mercy."

A hush full of solemnity fell upon the men as they listened. The card-players laid their cards on the

table. They appreciated the fact that they were getting a report of some of the strenuous doings in the war, and by an eye-witness and participator in the events.

"Two of the bearers halt near the side of the ditch. A Sister, guessing what the action means, runs to the dying man, and kneels in the mud at the side of the litter. The other calls to a Belgian priest attending another brave fellow, who is in the agony of death, to come quickly. The priest hastens to hear the dying man's confession; the Sisters kneel in prayer, comforting the poor soldier's last moments as his life ebbs away in gasps."

One of the card-players, evidently of the Roman Catholic faith, bowed his head, and furtively crossed himself.

Jack had hoped that by appealing to the better nature of the actor, he would evince his regret for his flippancy, and perhaps offer an apology; but the cynical sneer on Benton's face disillusionized Jack on that score. His wrath arose at the sight of the actor's contemptuous expression, and his voice shook with scorn as he said:

"Those delicate women, and those Sisters belong to the same sex, the same womanhood that you, you lump of corruption, dare to foul with your dirty, rotten stories!"

"Good for you, young feller," came from one of the card-players in the background.

Benton, shaking with amusement, gracefully flicked the ash off his cigar, and drawled in a sing-song, "In fine or wet weather, they're always together . . . ." He

leaned forward with a gesture of a teacher instructing a pupil. "Isn't it significant, my dear boy, that where there is a nun, you will always find a big, fat priest? Did you ever wonder 'why'?"

The blood surged up into Jack's throat. His ears sang with the intensity of the pressure. Ripping out an oath, his fist crashed against the actor's jaw with a sickening thud!

Coming unexpectedly, Benton had no time to ward off the blow. He fell backward, along with his heavy chair, in a heap on the floor. The passengers were no less surprised, and, for the moment, looked stunned. It was so sudden! Benton, much sobered by the blow, struggled to his feet. He had turned deathly white; all the evil in his nature on top. Seizing the heavy glass carafe from the table, he lurched forward to where Jack stood, cold as ice, awaiting the attack, promising himself he would not spare Benton the thrashing he deserved. The men near the table, however, were not disposed to look on with indifference at what promised to be an unequal combat. Some bit of manhood in their natures had awakened. They threw themselves on the enraged actor and wrested the decanter out of his grasp; while he, speechless with a white rage, struggled to get at his assailant.

"No, no! That's too much of a good thing," protested one; "to go for a wounded man that way!"

"Leave him alone, and let him come," Jack advised in a cold, even voice. "The vile, rotten cur. He ought to be thrown overboard!"

With a snarl of rage the actor broke loose from their hold; and, with his fingers curved like the talons

of an unclean bird of prey, rushed at the aviator. Gauging the distance as the enraged actor came, Jack swerved aside and met the onslaught with a solid punch just below Benton's ear, knocking him over the table, and on to the floor where he lay inert.

"Perhaps that will shut his mouth for awhile," muttered Jack grimly, when he saw the effect of his blow. That old boxing trick had many times before served him in good stead, but he had never felt such elation over its success as he did now; all the fight was knocked out of Benton.

Hearing the commotion, two of the ship's officers rushed in to see what all the noise was about.

"What's the trouble?" one of them asked Jack.

"The dirty blackguard was airing his opinions of women, and as I once had a mother, I couldn't stand it any longer; so I gave him a bit of what is due him."

"And a little bit of all right, all right, I should say from the look of him," the officer chortled, rubbing his chin and tilting his head judicially.

"Good for you," the other officer joined in; "I've been longing to hand him one myself. I hope you gave it to him good and plenty; the conceited ass needs taking down a peg or two."

"It was a peach of a smash, believe me," chimed in one of the passengers, rubbing his hands in enjoyment. "Looked like one of Kid McCoy's corkscrews!"

"He deserved it all right," announced another.

"He sure did," came from one of Benton's audience.

Jack looked fixedly at the last speaker. "Yet you men, who are old enough to know better, encouraged him in his dirty talk by listening to him. You are fine

specimens of men. I wonder that you could sit listening to him slandering your own wives and mothers. The damn scamp! A bullet would be too good for the vile skunk!"

With a look of scorn, Jack went out on deck, leaving the others to help the officers take the slowly reviving actor to his stateroom.

III.

Hamilton the artist was working strenuously on a drawing; trying to make up for lost time. His model, by promises of more work in the immediate future, had been persuaded to break an engagement with her "steady company" to give him the extra evening hours. She was now standing on the model's throne, posing for one of the characters in the drawing. After a couple of deep-drawn sighs (for the artist's benefit) and a prolonged yawn (when he was looking at her) as a preliminary warning, she asked in a weary tone, "Can I take a rest now?"

Hamilton glanced at her in surprise. "Good gracious! Are you tired already? Why you haven't been there more than ten or fifteen minutes!"

The girl let her figure sag into an attitude of weariness; making the pose express something very different from what was desired.

"Tired already? Huh! you'd be tired if you had to hold this pose," she retorted. "You artists must sit up of nights scheming out difficult poses. I've had nothing but standing poses all the week."

"What the dickens do you expect? Nice reclining poses on soft cushions, with somebody to fan you and give you ice-cream, I suppose."

"Easy for you to talk!" she exclaimed, tossing her head. "Just standing at an easel, smoking cigarettes while you draw. You've got a cinch!"

"A l l r i g h t," he drawled; "Take a rest."

He had heard that "spiel"—as he called it—so often, he knew it was sheer waste of time to argue the point. The model belied her assertion by jumping gaily off the throne, and flopping on to a cushion alongside the tabouret on which was the planchette. Inwardly cursing his stupidity of employing the girl, and vowing that he would not engage her again after he had finished with this batch of illustrations, Hamilton worked on the background of his drawing; every now and then stepping away from his easel to see the effect of his work.

His doorbell rang. As he turned to admit his visitors, the door opened and the Cogans appeared in the entrance.

"May we come in?" inquired Cogan walking into the room. "Hard at it, eh?"

"Yeh, hard at it," repeated the artist, catching sight of Mrs. Cogan, and wondering who she was.

"I am Mrs. Tom Cogan," she announced as she saw the look of inquiry. She held out her hand.

"Oh! pardon, Kitty," Cogan cut in; "I thought you had met Hamilton. Allow me to introduce to you the hardest worker in the profession, Mr. George Hamilton, who is as lazy as he is long, and as full of excuses as he is of talent."

"That's a fine send-off, isn't it?" laughed Mrs. Cogan merrily.

"Tom's bark is worse than his bite," returned Hamil-

ton, smiling. "Probably you know that without my telling you."

"And it is a darned lucky thing for you scamps that it is," the editor retorted jovially. "You fellows get all the barks from me, but I get all the bites from the boss!"

"That's just as it should be," grinned Hamilton; "seeing what a hefty brute he has to bite. Now if he tried to bite me, he'd find nothing but bones to break his teeth on."

Laughing joyously at the passage of words, Mrs. Cogan gazed round the studio with an admiring interest.

"Judging from all the pictures and sketches you have here, you cannot be so *very* lazy, Mr. Hamilton. Are they all your work?"

"All but a few done by some of my fellow daubers."

"May I be nosey, and look around while you are talking business with my poor defenceless hubby?"

"Yes, indeed you may." He returned her smile with interest, his artist faculties aroused by her beauty. "Please make yourself at home; this is Liberty Hall." As she nodded her smiling thanks, the lights above the model's throne beyond streamed over her shoulders and bust, and caught the edge of her head; bringing into high relief her voluptuous figure and beautiful face crowned with a mass of dark reddish wavy hair. One of those accidental effects which delight the soul of an artist, and makes his fingers itch for brushes and colours.

"Jove! but she'd make a stunning picture!" exclaimed Hamilton to himself.

"Well, how are you getting along with my stuff?" inquired Cogan examining the drawing on the easel. "Which is this, number one or number two?"

"That's the last; thank goodness. Here are the others." Hamilton brought from a shelf the other drawings, and stood them against the model's throne for Cogan's inspection.

While her husband was looking at the drawings, Mrs. Cogan made a tour of the studio, admiring the many small sketches on the walls, and wondering if she could induce her husband to buy one or two of them for their home. When she and her husband entered the studio, she noticed the model squatting on the cushion; now, approaching her, and seeing the girl so interested in the queer-shaped thing on the taboret, she wondered what it was. She stood for a while watching the erratic movements of the planchette, then, catching sight of her husband buttoning his coat, indicating that his immediate business with the artist was finished, she strolled over to where the two men were talking. Touching the artist lightly on his arm, and giving a sidelong glance and nod toward the model, she whispered:

"Excuse my feminine curiosity, but what's the . . ." she paused for the word.

"Oh, that? That's a new stunt!" Hamilton smiled and turned to Cogan. "Have you seen it, Tom?"

The editor looked toward the model, and shook his head.

"No; what is it? A new game of solitaire?"

Hamilton sniggered. "Not exactly. Come over and see how it works. It may interest you."

They followed the artist to where the model was sitting on the cushion.

"Miss Miller, this is Mr. and Mrs. Cogan," he said, by way of introduction. "They haven't seen this planchette stunt. Perhaps you'll tell them how it works."

The model acknowledged the introduction with a curt nod, annoyed at the interruption.

"First of all it isn't a 'stunt;' it is very serious," she retorted with a fling. "I rest my fingers on the planchette, and someone in the spirit world guides the planchette so that it writes a message."

Mrs. Cogan glanced at the men with an amused expression of incredulity. Her husband smiled good-naturedly. This, evidently, was only another of the numerous fads and fancies of Bohemia; and freaks and fads of the studio tribe were to him an old, old tale.

His wife bent over the girl's shoulder, and her eyes followed the movements of the planchette.

"Why, Tom, it is writing!" she exclaimed.

Cogan squatted down on his heels in front of the tabouret to watch the performance.

"Who, did you say, does the writing?" he asked the girl.

"Spirits, in the spirit world," was her grave answer.

"Hm! I'll bet a dollar that's old Horace Greeley writing now. Just like his scrawl. It was so bad," he explained to Hamilton, "that most of the time he couldn't read it himself!"

"If the writing is any criterion," Mrs. Cogan chimed in, "that poor spirit needs a bromo-seltzer badly. He is evidently suffering from an extreme case of 'jazz.'"

"Kind of looks as if he had been out all night with the boys, doesn't it?" Hamilton ventured with a grin.

"Prohibition hasn't struck his town yet, that is sure," the editor opined.

"Spirits come from the spirit world, don't they?" Mrs. Cogan asked with an assumption of innocence.

"Gee! That guy makes me feel thirsty, the way he is wobbling." Hamilton wiped his lips reminiscently.

They all laughed when the model straightened up, looking hurt and disgusted at their levity.

"You can laugh, and crack cheap jokes all you want. I know it is true!"

"Well, come now. If it is a spirit that is doing the writing, why can't he or she do it without having your hand on the board?" Cogan asked, conciliatingly. "Be easier to move without your hand, I should imagine."

"Ah! that's just what I want to know," cut in Hamilton.

"I am sure I don't know why," drawled the girl with a shrug. "If you like, I'll ask them to give you the answer."

Cogan caught his wife's eye; she shook her head positively.

"Some other time, perhaps. Tonight we have to catch a train."

The model's only response was a quick lift of her shoulders.

"Well, now, old chap," Cogan said, rising to an upright position, "will you have the drawings at the office tomorrow? I want to get them to the engravers as soon as I can. We are behind time as it is."

"Yep! I'll have them down there by noon at the latest."

"Sure now?"

"Abso-positively certain," laughed the artist.

"All right, old man; I'll depend on you. Good night, Miss . . ." Cogan had already forgotten her name. "Sorry not to be able to get some new dope from my old friend Greeley."

"Good night," the girl replied in a detached tone. She was too much engrossed in the planchette to retort to Cogan's quip.

Mrs. Cogan shook hands with Hamilton, and wished him good night. "I want to come again, sometime. I have fallen in love with one or two of your sketches, and perhaps my hubby will be rich enough next time we come to buy them for me." She waved her hand to a group of water-colors on the wall.

"Suppose we won't wait until hubby is rich enough," Hamilton suggested. "Suppose you accept them as a souvenir of your visit."

"That is very generous and lovely of you, and I appreciate it very much; but I couldn't think of taking advantage of your kindness. You have to live, like the rest of us; so you wait, and I'll give you some real money for them."

"I know, but . . ." Hamilton paused, wondering if on such short acquaintance, he could risk offering her the sketches as a return for her giving him sittings for a picture.

"I'll come again, soon," Mrs. Cogan assured him. "Good night."

"Yes, do. Good night."

Cogan had gone out into the corridor to the elevator, and pushed the button; his wife joined him at the same time the elevator shot up to their floor. When the elevator gate opened, Tracy, the short-story writer —a contributor to Cogan's magazine—stepped out.

"Hullo, Tom; what are you doing in town? And—Mrs. Cogan, by all the Gods! Why, beloved lady, I haven't seen your beautiful self for an age! How are you? You look well." Tracy shook hands with her, delighted to see her again.

"Of course she is looking well," Cogan said. "Why shouldn't she, when she has me to look after her and pamper her?"

"Look after her! You mean she looks after you; you big bluff. Ye gods! but you are a lucky beggar! They say it is better to be born lucky than beautiful; but when one is both beautiful and lucky, like you, why. . . ."

"Ye-eh!" Cogan replied sarcastically. "I am so overwhelmed with my own pulchritude, I dare not have a mirror in my room; and every time I go out I am in mortal fear that some grass widow or other will steal me!"

"Some beauty!" Mrs. Cogan gazed at her husband in mock admiration.

"Going down," the elevator man warned in a dry tone.

"Yes! hold your horses now; just a second," cried Cogan. He turned to Tracy. "Say, old man, we've just come from Hamilton's. He has old Horace Greeley in there. You ought to go in and have a talk with him; might get some pointers from him."

Enjoying the joke, the Cogans got into the elevator, which descended leaving Tracy mystified.

"Horace Greeley," he muttered. "I s'pose Ham is doing a picture of him."

He rang Hamilton's door-bell.

"Did you meet Cogan and his wife? They just left —a few moments ago," the artist announced when he opened the door. "She is a beauty; didn't know he had such a lovely wife."

"Yes, I met them as I got out of the elevator. Tom told me to come in here and see Horace Greeley. Are you making a portrait of him?"

The artist exploded with laughter. Pointing to the planchette, he explained the joke. Tracy glanced toward the tabouret, and nodded to the model whom he knew by sight.

"Did you ever try planchette, Mr. Tracy? To get ideas for your stories?" she asked.

"I should say . . . not!" Tracy replied in a tone of contempt. "That thing is only good to amuse old women who have nothing better to do with their time. I get *my* ideas inspirationally." He put his hand above his head, and, shutting his fist, made a gesture as if grabbing an idea and yanking it down out of the atmosphere.

Hamilton, who was working on his drawing, turned and shook his stick of charcoal warningly. "Don't you go telling Cogan that; it might queer your stories with him. He is very sceptical."

Tracy laughed quietly. "Yes, I know Cogan is too materialistic to believe in such things." He shook his head, thoughtfully. "Funny, when you come to

think of it. He is a man who goes to church and believes in a heaven and hell; but when *I* talk about super-normal things to him, he only laughs in a condescending way, and pooh-poohs the whole business."

The model glanced at Tracy, and nodded her agreement with his sentiments. "One would think he would know better, seeing that his own Bible contains lots of instances of spirit communication," she drawled in a contemptuous voice. "But perhaps, like most of these people who go to church, he doesn't read his Bible."

"And the lives of the saints are full of instances, too," added Tracy; "but perhaps as I've not *yet* been canonized, my little say-so does not count for much." He chuckled humorously.

"Well, say, Tracy, honest now; do you think that spirits manipulate that thing?" Hamilton pointed to the planchette.

"Don't ask me!" exclaimed Tracy. "I know very little about it. I do know, however, that I, personally have no use for it. As I told you: I get my stuff inspirationally."

"Hmp! I must confess that that is just so much Greek to me," responded the artist. "All I know about *my* stuff is: I've got to sweat and plug like the devil until it looks right; and believe me, sometimes it's some job!" He turned to the girl. "Say, Miss Miller, come along and give me another half hour, so that I can break the back of this job, and get it in shape for tomorrow."

IV.

The Cogans arrived at the terminal just in time to catch the out-going 8.10 train.

Their home in Malvern Beach—to which they were now speeding—was a two story stuccoed frame house of the kind generally found in American suburban communities, where speculative builders buy a piece of land and on it build whole blocks of houses made of "mill" material; and, with the exception of minor differences of details, of the same pattern. Situated apart from its neighbors at a distance of about twenty feet on each side, it had the usual apology for a lawn in front, some flower beds at the side, and a kitchen garden in the rear.

Mrs. Cogan was constantly at her husband to build a little house of their own; she did not care how small and unpretentious so long as it was theirs. She suggested that if he did not think it wise to use the little nest egg in the local bank for that purpose, there were other ways and means; building it on the installment plan—for instance, or borrowing money from his employer (the owner of the magazine) and paying him back so much a month. She argued that it would be merely paying the equivalent of the rent to his "boss" instead of giving it to the landlord. Her husband

sympathized with her desires, but did not like the idea of being in debt to anyone; not even to please her. He disliked being under obligations to other people, and he had a horror of debts; being always afraid that he might be unable to meet them. "Don't you worry, and get a lot of ugly lines in your lovely face," he was fond of saying. "When my ship comes home, and it will be soon now, you shall have the prettiest little ranch in this village. When I put one of my plays across, and get it produced, we shall have money enough to build a palace." And he had hopes; for the theatrical man who was acting as his selling agent had fallen in love with one of his comedies, and felt fairly certain of landing it with one of the New York managers. Meantime, while waiting for the proceeds of the, as yet, unproduced play to materialize, Mrs. Cogan had to be content in making the house she had as cozy and artistic as her means allowed.

When she and her husband arrived home after a walk of twenty minutes from the railroad station, they found their only child, Harold, now nearly five years old, and the servant girl, Maggie, at the dinner table, finishing their evening meal.

The young hopeful had half a dozen toys of various sorts lined up in a semi-circle on the table behind his plate. He had insisted on sharing his custard dessert with them, and had tried to feed them out of his spoon: with the result that the faces of the Teddy Bear and the other toy figures were besmeared with custard, giving them most ludicrous expressions. Between spoonfuls he kissed the Bear and his especial favorite—a large toy French soldier that his Uncle Jack had sent

from France, so that his own chubby face was plastered with the stuff. When he heard the front door open, and his mother's "coo-hoo," he hastily slid off his high chair and ran into the corridor, yelling out an answering "coo-hoo" to his parents. His father caught him up in his arms to kiss him, but stopped in time to avoid being smeared with the custard.

"Good lord, Kitty; just look at this kid's mug!" He held the youngster at arm's length for his mother's inspection. "There's a picture for an artist. There's a picture that beats anything Hamilton can do into a cocked hat."

"Oh! Oh! you dear little kiddlums! How can mumsie kiss such a face as that?" Mrs. Cogan went into gales of merriment at the comical appearance of the child. "Did you ever see such a map?"

She followed her husband and boy into the dining room.

"Why on earth did you let him do it, Maggie?"

"I couldn't stop him, mum," the servant replied between laughs. She pointed to the toys; the sight threw Mrs. Cogan into another paroxysm. The child stood blinking at his elders, wondering, with a blank look, what all the merriment was about.

"Ain't 'oo doin' to tith me?" he lisped petulantly to his mother.

"Sure I will, sweetheart; as soon as I can find a clean spot," she said, laughing as she wiped his face with a napkin. Then she smothered the child's face with kisses as she hugged him to her bosom; calling him all the endearing names she could think of.

"I'm going to look over this truck, Kitty," said

Cogan, indicating the parcel of manuscripts he had brought home with him; "so that I can get off for a couple of hours tomorrow to go to the pier."

"All right," she answered, as he turned to go to his study. "Better kiss this young pagan 'good night' now, Tom; for . . ." she addressed the youngster, tapping his nose playfully with her finger, "he is going to bye-bye, right away."

Cogan laughed as he kissed the boy and pinched his cheek; then went out of the room to continue his editorial duties.

Next morning, the Cogans were up bright and early. Harold, full of excitement and expectancy, could hardly contain himself for joy; for his Uncle Jack was coming home on a big ship, and would arrive today.

Uncle Jack at that time was at the rail on deck, looking through field-glasses at the stretch of land dimly seen in the haze of the mist on the water; his mind occupied with pleasant thoughts of his home-coming. Hearing himself addressed by a suave voice, he turned to see Benton, the actor, at his side.

"Mr. Waller," the actor began, with an ingratiating smile, "I . . . had too much to drink last night, and . . . well . . . you know how it is. We say and do things . . . mm . . . I want to apologize for what I said," he ended lamely.

Waller glanced at the hand Benton held out to him,

then looked sternly at his eyes. "I accept your apology for what you said to me, but your opinions regarding women are evidently too deeply rooted for you to change them overnight; so I'll be damned if I shake hands with a reptile like you!" And with a look of contemptuous loathing, the aviator walked away.

Benton went white, and his hands shook with anger. His face contorted with hate, he looked evilly after Waller. "Reptile, am I? By God, I'll remember you for that! You . . . damned . . . pup!" He spat out the words through his clenched teeth. "If I ever get the chance. . . ." He drew a deep breath which he exhaled with a hissing sound.

He little thought how closely the web of Fate had enmeshed them. How soon its tangled threads were to tighten, and again bring them together.

Cogan left the house to catch an early train, while his wife busied herself preparing to meet her brother at the pier. On his arrival at the village station, he bought a copy of the local paper, which announced in large headlines the appointment of the new District Attorney.

"What do you think of the news, Cogan?" inquired one of a group of men waiting for the train.

"I think it is about time! I hope he will start in clearing the hoboes out of this village; they are getting to be a confounded nuisance."

The others agreed with him. Their wives had all, at one time or other, suffered from the insults and depredations of the numerous tramps that made Malvern Beach a stopping-off place on their way to the city.

"So far as I am concerned," chimed in one of the men, "he can get busy right away; the quicker the sooner. I can't afford to lose three perfectly new silk shirts at one clip."

"Huh! You got off easy," said another. "I am minus a dress suit! I'd dearly like to have a ten minutes session with the bum that swiped it. Ten minutes is all I ask!"

"Well, if this new guy isn't any better than the last one—the grafter! why. . . ."

"They do say that this duck is one of those very rare birds, an honest official. Plays no favorites, and as cold-blooded as a clam."

"Seems rather too good to be true; but I hope he is," Cogan said decisively. "That's the kind of man I like; and that's the kind we need in public life."

"That's right," agreed the first speaker. "Now you are saying something. We need 'em all right!"

In the train the qualifications of the new District Attorney were discussed at length; all those who knew of his antecedents and official life agreeing that his reputation for honesty was second to none. He was straight as a die; and as free from emotion as the proverbial clam.

During the dreary, heart breaking period a few weeks later, Cogan would have been thankful more than once if the Attorney's cold-bloodedness were less in evidence; more a figure of speech, and less of a reality.

V.

In the city—the city that never sleeps, where there is always "something doing" day and night—our friend Tracy, the short-story writer, dressed in a pair of old trousers, a battered pair of carpet slippers on his feet, and a well-browned corn-cob pipe in his mouth, was sitting at his working table, staring glumly at his typewriter.

For the past two hours he had pounded on his machine, writing page after page, only to tear them up in disgust. On the table, besides his working materials, was a large tin can which, at some time in the past, had held coffee, but now formed the receptacle for coarse cut tobacco; also a pot of strong coffee and an ancient-looking china mug from which he took big daughts between pipes.

His usual working hours were from late in the evening to the early hours of morning. He found that the comparative quiet of the night was more conducive to doing creative work; his ideas came quicker and with more fluidity; his brain processes worked easier and with less strain than during the day. Such was his custom; for which he had a reason.

He claimed that in the daytime, people who were strenuously striving in the battle of life, scheming how

to outwit their fellows, created a veritable maelstrom in the thought atmosphere; and as the plane of ideas was, so to speak, above the thought-plane of ordinary business,—the business of buying and selling,—it was difficult for him to make the necessary connections with the higher plane of thought; the slender thread being constantly broken by the coarse vibrations of the warring elements of the lower thought-plane. At night, when most people were sleeping and at rest, the lower thought-plane was comparatively quiet and less turbulent; with the result that it was much easier to make his connection with the upper plane, and also to hold it.

It was one of his many "queer" notions; and he was full of such strange fancies.

Generally speaking, he had only to throw himself on his lounge (which also served as a bed), close his eyes for fifteen or twenty minutes, and ideas would flow into his consciousness in a steady stream; marshalling themselves almost automatically into sequences of connected action. As he often remarked with a dry smile, his stories wrote themselves; all he did was type them. But now, the ideas would not come! At least, not ideas of any value. A half-baked, hazy suggestion would seep up in his mind, he would try it out for a few pages, then the thing would peter out into nothingness. A blind alley! He had been doing that all night! Always with the same result! And he would end his attempt at a story with a string of oral pyrotechnics too lurid to print!

Reading over the lines on the partly typed page in his machine, he muttered a malediction on the evil fate

that had induced him to turn to story writing as a means of livelihood, yanked the sheet of paper out of the typewriter, crushed it into a ball, then viciously threw it into his waste-paper basket.

"Punk! Punk! Worthless, inane fribbly namby-pamby, damned punk!" he exploded. "What the devil is wrong with me, anyway? And always happens when I need some dough. Darn it!"

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, refilled and lit it; then leaned back in his chair, glaring sulkily at the unoffending typewriter while he probed the recesses of his memory for an idea on which to build a story.

If Tracy had been clairvoyant, he would have understood the why and wherefore of not only his present inability to get an idea for a story, but many other things which at one time perplexed and puzzled him, and, at other times, filled him with elation and exaltation. Near him and unseen by his physical vision were two forms; in common parlance they would be called "*spirits.*"

In our western world, if the average man were asked "what is a spirit?" he probably would hesitate and be at a loss for a definition; and quite as probably end up by saying that a spirit was what a man became after death. If pressed for a more definite description, he would most likely confess his ignorance.

While it is certain (as anything can be in this world) that a man's life here on earth has a limit; that although he may live beyond the scriptural alloted three score years and ten, he is sure that *sometime* he will die; yet the greater number of human beings know

practically nothing of what they may expect after they pass out of this life. It is true they are told by their pastors that there is a heaven of bliss for those who are "saved," and a hell of torment awaiting those evil-doers who have not been saved; although in our fashionable churches today preachers employ their talents expatiating on the joys of the heaven-life rather than insult their pew-holders by pointing out the penalties of hell; such talk of retribution being very much out of place —in a fashionable gathering. We are told by our spiritual advisors that heaven and hell are eternal—although the latter is not so bad as it was fifty years ago; that while a man may have been one of the vilest of men all through his life, yet, if he repents—even at the eleventh hour (which he is certain to do through fear, if for no other reason)—he goes to a heaven of everlasting happiness. On the other hand: in the case of the man, who, (although he has led a blameless life), being tempted, temporarily falls and sins; if he happens to die while sinning, he goes to an eternal hell of torment!

While not wishing to comment on the injustice and unreasonableness of this, it may be pointed out that this is about all the average man seems to know about a future state. If he is of an inquiring turn of mind, and asks those—who should be in a position to inform him—to tell him of the whereabouts of heaven and hell, to give him detailed information regarding the occupations of the man in the blissful or other state, he will find that *so far as exact knowledge is concerned* those who claim to be his spiritual leaders know no more than he himself knows.

It is only within the last few decades that accounts of what purports to be the real life in the world to come have percolated into literature for general consumption, enabling persons who study along those lines of thought to accumulate data of various sorts and degrees of trustworthiness regarding the so-called Heaven-world; also of the so-called Astral-world which separates the Heaven-world from our Earth-world.

To *trained* clairvoyants, the existence of the Astral-world and Heaven-world is not a question of *belief*, but of fairly exact *knowledge.*

To such an one, the man who, after death, enters the astral world is, to all intents and purposes, *the same man, bearing with him all his likes and dislikes, his loves and his hates, his desires good and bad; the same characteristics that distinguished him from his fellows while in this earth-world before death. He is the same individual* minus his physical body, and is in a body composed of the material of the world in which he now is—the Astral-world. This body (called by St. Paul—I Cor: XV, 44—"*soma psuchikon*"—psychic body) he has had all through his earth-life; its particles interpenetrating the particles of his physical body, but being of a very much finer matter than the physical is not cognizable by physical sight.

This digression is deemed necessary (and hoped pardonable) so that the uninitiated can more readily grasp the *real* meaning of the after-death state, and understand more clearly the happenings which played such a vital part in this drama of metropolitan life; for the filmy wall separating the astral from the earth life is thin, *very very thin.* The inhabitants of the astral

(the so-called "dead") have for ages influenced, *and are at present* influencing and affecting those on earth; sometimes for good, ofttimes for evil.

To return to our story, and to Tracy's two discarnate visitors;—the so-called "spirits."

They were, as already said, two male forms; men who had crossed into the "great beyond" some years before. When on earth, they had been bosom friends; one an artist, the other an author. They both had learned that one of the ways to progress out of the astral condition and attain to the heaven-world was by helping their fellows in both astral and earth worlds; in the latter case, by throwing suggestions and ideas into the consciousness of *incarnated men*, giving them higher and more ideal conceptions. Being aware of Tracy's dilemma (for emotional states are plainly visible on the astral plane, the astral body being that part of us with which we express our desires and emotions), the two discarnate friends had appeared on the scene, and now stood watching the surging colors of his aura as its atoms vibrated—the result of his emotional state.

"Your protégé seems to be having trouble again." the discarnate artist remarked with a smile. "Apparently, he is 'stuck' for want of ideas. Are you going to help him?"

"No, I don't think I shall," replied the discarnate author. "The precious scamp is getting a swelled head. He boasts of *his* stories; *his* clever ideas! It may do him some good to let him sweat a bit, it may take the conceit out of him; otherwise he may forget where he gets his inspiration from. That would be a

pity, especially in his case; he is such a splendid fellow otherwise."

The discarnate artist smiled sadly. "It is remarkable on what small achievements we develop the swelled head. Only for the gentle rod of correction, we would soon be monstrous egotists!"

"Especially the man with creative ability," the author replied. "I think it will be for Tracy's ultimate good to let him realize his own weakness, then he will keep his mind on higher things."

"If that is how you feel about him, suppose we move along."

"Are you doing anything in particular?" inquired the discarnate author.

"Yes, indeed! There is a clever young chap, poor as a church mouse, struggling with a painting of an ideal type. He has caught some of the vision, and I want to help him get the rest of it. He has to do what he calls 'commercial' work to feed his body, and keep going while painting his picture; for he realizes, I imagine, that he hasn't much time before he comes over to us. Poor chap, he will be glad to come! He isn't coarse-fibred enough to cope successfully with earth conditions; but he is striving manfully and doing his best. As you know, there are but few buyers of paintings of a spiritual type. Men prefer to spend their money on things of a suggestive, sensual kind; things which appeal to their lower, animal nature."

"So it was in our day," the discarnate author replied with a sigh. "The 'seers' starved while the writers of salacious novels rode in their carriages; their stomachs stuffed to excess! Do you remember that club

we drifted into the other evening? Where I pointed out to you one of the successful novelists of the day? A fellow that has become rich by writing novels so suggestive, so near the limit of decency that the Government warned the publisher of the magazine in which they were appearing, to tone down the suggestive passages, and to be more careful in the future, otherwise . . ." he shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"And all in the name of 'art!' "—the artist exclaimed. "How very few of them know what ART really means. That is why I am so interested in this young man; he is full of the divine fire of art, burning his gross physical body away at its altar."

"I shall be glad to go with you; for next to watching a musician catching supernal melodies, seeing an artist transferring his inner vision onto canvas is my greatest delight."

"Come along then, and we'll leave my friend Tracy to learn his lesson of humility."

Although of an impressionable, psychic type, Tracy had not the gift of clairvoyant sight; so he knew but little of the rationale of what he called "getting an idea." He was vaguely aware of what Plato calls the "Plane of Ideas"—the Ideal World, but whether ideas were hanging on pegs like articles in a store, or were floating listlessly about to finally lodge in somebody's brain waiting for them, he did not know; truth to tell,

he had never given much thought to that aspect of the matter. He, like others, would say: "An idea struck me," or "An idea came to me;" but it did not occur to him to wonder *why* or *how* they came. He did not know that *thoughts are living things*, that they must have an origin *somewhere*, and in some entity's consciousness. He did not realize that as those ideas were of a much higher type, and displayed more intelligence and cleverness than his intellectual brain could invent, they indicated their source as being of a higher nature than that of his physical brain. He was unaware, too, that intelligence of various and different grades extended from the intelligence of the earth inhabitants all the way up, through higher and still higher and greater Intelligences, to the Throne of INTELLIGENCE ITSELF,—which we call "GOD."

In spite of the fact that he had had numerous instances in his own life of strange "accidents," "coincidences," and interventions at critical times, he had not sounded the deeper truth that all these happenings are not due to "chance," but are according to the working of Cosmic Law, carried into effect by Greater and Lesser Intelligences who are the instruments of that LAW.

Thrown on his own resources, Tracy cudgelled his tired, overworked brain to discover something that would serve as the basis of a story. He delved into

the recesses of his memory, but that proving non-productive, got from a drawer-file—in which he kept such data—a lot of newspaper and magazine clippings, over which he skimmed with the hope of finding some incident that would stimulate his writer's inventive faculty. His search for material was interrupted by the ringing of his telephone bell; Tom Cogan being at the other end of the wire.

"Hello, Tracy, old scout! Say! I want a good strong story; the usual length. Try and think up a good plot will you, and let me have the synopsis as soon as you can. Tomorrow, if possible."

Tracy laughed silently. "All right, old man; I'll do the best I can."

He put the phone down, looked at his typewriter, and snorted in amusement at the grim joke—being asked for a "good, strong story" when he couldn't scare up an idea of any sort. Walking over to his working table, he refilled his corn-cob; then paced up and down the narrow strip of carpet running the length of his room—thinking.

Again he was disturbed. This time by a knock on the door.

"Somebody wanting a best seller, probably," he muttered, ironically. "If it is, he will have to pay me cash on account."

Opening the door, he disclosed to view the sour visage of the landlord's clerk with the monthly bill for rent in his hand.

"Ah! Yes, yes! The ever welcome tax gatherer, eh?" he exclaimed in a jocular tone.

The clerk did not crack a smile. He knew only too

well what the greeting portended; he had been there before.

"Come along in a couple of days, and I'll fix you up," said Tracy with a wave of his hand.

"It is overdue now, Mr. Tracy," replied the clerk coldly. "Can't you give me something on account?"

"Not a stiver, old chappie! Not a red cent until I cash the million dollar check I expect to get in the near future."

"Good morning," said the clerk, curtly. "I'll call in tomorrow."

"Don't you do it," Tracy replied hastily; "you'll only waste your time. Make it three or four days from now, and I'll see what I can do."

He closed the door with a grin of amusement. With the reflection that "it never rains but it pours," he sat down at his table.

Staring blankly at the typewriter, his thoughts went back to the scene of the previous evening in Hamilton's studio. He saw the model curled up on the cushion with the planchette; he heard her question, "did you every try planchette to get ideas for your stories?" and remembered his contemptuous reply. He found himself wondering if the contraption he had ridiculed might not, after all, be of some use to him. He was aware that the literary sensation of a year or so ago had been given out to the world as having been written by the aid of a ouija board; perhaps this planchette thing could be of use to him. This digging up new ideas for stories was no joke! He recalled that someone had said there were only about three dozen basic plots, and

that all stories are but these thirty-six plots rehashed in a new dress, or with a new twist.

"Great Scott! I've done them so often, there doesn't seem to be a new twist left," he growled disconsolately. "I've a durned good mind to buy one of those things and try it."

Then he sniggered and shook with laughter, for he suddenly remembered how low his finances were, and that he didn't have a dollar to his name; that he would probably be obliged to borrow carfare from one of his friends in order to submit his synopsis—when he evolved one—to Cogan. The thought of how close he was to rock-bottom made him cackle with amusement.

The discarnate author had either changed his intention of letting Tracy "sweat awhile," or had realized that he was sorely in need of money; for he now appeared behind Tracy. With a reminiscent expression, as though he remembered his own struggles and depressions when on earth, he proceeded, by throwing suggestions into Tracy's brain, to give him the mental impression of the outlines of a story.

As the suggestions were slowly translated into brain-images, Tracy smiled in anticipation of what was coming.

He had often gone through the experience of having the outlines of a story come into his mind, seemingly from nowhere; unless it seeped up from his subconscious self—as the psychologists asserted. Sometimes, merely the outlines only; another time, the whole story *en bloc*, word for word, would come. Then again—and he couldn't fathom the reason why—a dozen paragraphs or so would be all; then the cursed, exasperat-

ing waiting (sometimes for days!) for the remainder. It was nothing new to him. Now, as the plot evolved and took definite shape, he seized a pad of paper and hurriedly jotted down the skeleton of what promised to be a strong story, such as Cogan had asked for.

"Quite a new twist, too, by Jove!" Tracy chuckled, reading over his shorthand notes. "Absolutely a new twist!"

His unseen helper (the discarnate author) also chuckled—with amusement.

"A new twist, is it, Tracy? It may be new to you, but it had moss on it in ancient Atlantis; and even in old Egypt it was a hoary old chestnut. Oh! you clever, up-to-date moderns; you think you are the last word in civilization!"

Fortunately for Tracy, he was not clairaudient; so did not hear the sarcastic comments of his unseen friend.

Knocking the ashes out of his corn-cob, he recharged and lit it; then started banging away at top speed on his typewriter.

VI.

Arrived at the pier, Mrs. Cogan looked about in the crowd for her husband. She did not waste much time in this, for the liner had arrived earlier than had been expected, and was already moored in the dock, with the passengers on the pier awaiting the Customs Officers to examine the baggage. Making her way to where the first-class passengers whose names began with "W" were standing, she caught sight of her brother Jack, and in a few moments had her arms tightly wound around his neck, kissing him excitedly between her sobs of joyful welcome.

"Oh, Jack boy! You dear, darling laddie! You don't know how glad I am to see you again." Then more kissing and hugging.

"I'm glad to be home again. You are looking tip-top, Kitty."

"I'm all right! How's your arm. Does it pain you?"

"It'll be O. K. in a week or so," replied her brother, beginning to feel ill at ease. He saw that his sister's extravagant actions made him the cynosure of everyone in sight. "Say, Kitty, old girl; cut out the fuss and hurrah, won't you?"

"Why should I?" she inquired, astonished. "I am

proud of you, and proud to show that I am proud of you, and . . .” looking defiantly at the passengers who were watching them with unfeigned interest, “. . .I don't care who knows it. I'll tell the world I am proud of you!”

“Very well . . . Irish!” laughed Jack.

His sister's retort was nipped in the borning by the appearance of a Customs Officer.

“Are you Mr. Waller, sir?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; that's my name.”

“How many pieces of baggage have you, Mr. Waller?”

“This grip and two trunks,” replied Jack, proceeding to open the grip. He was stopped by the official who marked it “O. K.” “Why . . . er . . .” he looked inquiringly at the officer who was marking the trunks with the “Examined” mark.

“The Chief presents his compliments, and says that if you will give me the address, he will have them forwarded to your destination at once.”

“That's . . . uh . . . unusual, isn't it?” stammered Jack.

“Orders from headquarters, I guess,” smiled the officer.

“Very kind of them, I am sure. Please thank the Chief for me, will you? Tell him I appreciate it very much.”

“Yes, sir, I will,” He paused; then, hesitatingly, put out his hand. “I'd like to shake hands with you, Mr. Waller.”

“With me?” asked Jack, surprised. “Sure thing; but why?” He grasped the outstretched hand.

"We all feel proud of you; fighting off those six Huns and getting in with the dispatches, sir."

"Didn't I tell you we were proud of you?" his sister chimed in ecstatically.

Jack flushed beneath his tan, and looked uncomfortable. To hide his embarrassment he turned to pick up his grip; but the officer was too quick for him.

"Allow me, sir; I'll show you the way out. Besides," he added with a suspicion of a chuckle, "you've only one hand free, and you'll need it before you get off the dock I'm thinking."

Jack Waller did not get the full import of the remark until he and his sister started to follow the officer toward the street entrance. Every two or three steps a Customs Officer or employe of the Steamship Company was there with his hand outstretched, waiting to shake Jack's in congratulation. His journey was a series of hand-clasps; every official on the pier apparently being there to give him a welcome home.

His sister enjoyed the demonstration immensely; strutting at the side of her brother who was biting his lips in annoyance. Posing as a hero was not in his line. Benton, the actor, being near the top of the alphabetical list, had had his baggage examined and was already on his way to his hotel; otherwise, the fuss made over his fellow passenger and antagonist of the night before might have added a few more notes to his song of hate.

When they got to the end of the handshaking, Jack found his voice. "Say, Kitty, where is Big Tom?"

She laughed merrily. "Blest if I hadn't forgotten all about the old dear! He promised to be here to meet you." Her brother glanced around for a sight of Cogan. "Oh, if he were here, he'd have seen us long ago," his sister assured him. "I suppose the poor soul wasn't able to get away." She caught sight of the telephone booths. "Wait a minute; I'll phone him."

He followed her to the booth, and waited while she rang up her husband's office.

"Is that you, Tom?" she asked when the connection was made. "This is Kitty. Wait a minute." She gave the receiver to her brother.

"Hullo, you big stiff!" he boomed. "How are yer?" A broad smile developed into a roar of laughter as he listened to Cogan's answer. "All right, old cough drop," he snickered; "make it early. We'll go on home, for I'm anxious to see the youngster." He turned to his sister, his eyes sparkling with enjoyment. "Tom says that every *mm mm mm* thing has gone wrong this *mm mm* morning; so he couldn't get away. Do you want to say anything more to him? He is swearing to beat the band!" Cogan heard the remarks, and his comments made Jack shake with laughter.

"I'm s'prised at you, Tom Cogan; using such awful language over a public telephone!" Mrs. Cogan warbled into the phone. "Have some thought for the poor innocent girl at the switchboard." She winked at Jack while she listened to her husband's grumbled

excuses. "Well, be sure to get home as early as you can, love, so that we can have dinner early."

"Goodbye for the present, old chappie," Jack yelled over his sister's shoulder. She hung up the receiver.

"He hasn't changed any. He's the same old Tom," laughed Jack, picking up his grip.

"The same old Tom," repeated Mrs. Cogan happily; "and as good as they make 'em, Jack."

He looked quizzingly at his sister. "As happy as ever, Kitty?"

"Happier than ever; if that is possible," she replied with a sigh of utter content.

VII

When the automobile containing Mrs. Cogan and her brother swung around the curve of the road, Mrs. Cogan pointed to her home a couple of hundred yards away.

"That's our shack, and . . ." catching sight of two figures near the roadside in front of the house—"and there's my own dear little kiddlums waiting for us; bless his little heart." She stood up and waved her hand excitedly.

When they arrived at the gate leading to the house, Harold broke loose from the servant's restraining hold, and clambered on to the running board; from which his uncle lifted him into the auto.

"Weltum 'ome, Unkie Dak," he lisped, throwing his arms around Jack's neck and hugging him.

"What do you know about that! He remembers you, all right! But don't mumsie get any kissings?" she asked with a jealous pout.

Gripping his uncle's coat collar the child bent over and kissed his mother; then leaned back and surveyed Jack's face happily while he caressed the tanned cheeks with his chubby hands.

"I'm so glad you've come home, mum," sighed the

servant when Mrs. Cogan reached the gate. "I've been busy all morning keeping him from being run over by automobiles. I've done no work at all—nothin' to speak of, all the morning!"

"Never mind, Maggie; never mind. We'll soon straighten things out," her mistress assured her gaily, turning to look at Jack with the child on his arm.

This was too joyous a moment to spoil by worrying over such inconsequential things as housework. Homecomings did not happen every day—so why borrow trouble? Her heart was full of happiness as she heard the youngster telling his uncle of the troubles he had with his toys; which, with his child's imagination, he had clothed in an air of reality; treating the inanimate figures as real personages. She heard the delightful lisp—the lisp that tugged with such sweet pain at her heart-strings—as he told how "vevy, vevy naughty" the Teddy Bear had been; and how he had been obliged to put him in a corner in disgrace—"all by hithef"—with the little French soldier standing guard over him; his uncle, who for the time being had entered the child's world of make-believe, interjecting comments with an air of seriousness befitting the occasion.

"That's right, Harold boy! Make him obey orders like a good soldier. Teach him to do his duty!" nodded his uncle approvingly.

Mrs. Cogan paused outside the door after Jack and the child had entered the house, and closed her eyes for a moment. A great wave of happiness flooded

her whole being, and swept her up to a pinnacle of exaltation.

"Oh, Lord!" she cried, inwardly, "be merciful to me—a sinner, and grant my prayer. Preserve my happy home . . . for the Christ's sake!"

Her face all aglow with emotion, she entered the house.

The trio had barely finished their luncheon when the trunks arrived from the steamship pier. They were taken into the large front room, for as Jack remarked, "They only contain a lot of truck I thought you'd like to have, and a few knick-knacks for some of my old college pals."

Certainly Jack unstrapped and unlocked the trunks; but it was Harold who did most of the unpacking.

The trunks were full of souvenirs of various sorts, which, when brought forth, were hailed with shrieks of joy from the irrepressible youngster. The crowning moment came when his uncle brought out a long cardboard box containing a large toy French soldier —almost as big as himself—dressed to the smallest detail in imitation of a French "poilu;" and when his uncle strapped a real steel helmet on his curly pate, the child was almost beside himself with joy. He strutted out of the room to show his treasures to the servant; his mother gazing after him with eyes moist with mother-love.

"Where did you get them, Jack?" she asked.

"I bought the soldier from a poor chap in one of the hospitals. He had only one arm, and two stumps for legs. He was trying to support himself by making toys and selling them to visitors."

"Oh! the poor fellow!"

"The helmet is one I've been wearing. They let me keep it, to show the folks over here. I wouldn't be here now only for that old lid. You'll find dents and cracks in it where shrapnel and a few other things hit it."

"But I thought they couldn't hit you—in an aeroplane!"

He turned to rummage in the trunk, so that she shouldn't see him smile at her ignorance. He brought out some hand grenades from which the charges had been extracted. He held one for her to look at.

"Here's a pretty little article. How would you like to see this coming at you?"

"What on earth is it?"

"First, you pull out this pin, then grab hold of this," —indicating the handle,—"swing it round your head a few times to get momentum, then . . . you let it go whizzing toward a trench where a lot of 'Boches' are lying snug and comfortable."

"Yes? And then what?"

"If your aim is good, it lands in the place you intended it should. It explodes, busts into a lot of small pieces, and . . . ." He raised his eyebrows significantly.

"And what, Jack?"

"It blows some Fritzies to the hell that is waiting for them!"

His sister stared at him with bulging eyes and horror in her face.

"My God, Jack!" she gasped, a cold sweat breaking out on her skin. "Do they, the Germans, do *they* throw anything like that at *you?*"

He grunted, amused at his sister's ignorance. "Where have you been living, Kitty? Don't you read the papers?"

"Yes, but I refuse to read anything about this dreadful war. It is too awful!"

"You say it is awful, but evidently you know precious little about it; otherwise you would not ask me such a question."

"Well, tell me! Do they throw them?"

"Do they! That is the least of their accomplishments. They do worse than that! They throw gas bombs full of poison gases which corrode the lungs like nitric acid eats through lead, so that when you breathe, your lungs and windpipe feel as if a lot of broken glass were tearing your live, tender flesh. They poison the wells; they inoculate their prisoners with disease germs; they knock out the brains of the wounded with their rifle-butts; they murder mothers and children; they rape little girls; they . . . ."

"Stop! Stop! For God's sake, stop! I didn't know there were such cruel fiends in the world." Her eyes brimmed with tears.

"'Fiends' is correct!" he said, laconically. "You ought to read a little more, Kitty, if only to know what's doing in this God-forsaken world."

"And to think that *you* have been exposing your life to all those dangers, while I have been living happily here in blissful ignorance, day after day. I feel quite guilty! I should imagine you would be afraid to go to sleep, not knowing what minute . . ." She was too horrified, thinking of the possibilities her imagination conjured up, to finish the sentence.

Jack gave a quick shrug; a trick he had, unconsciously, picked up from his French confrères.

"Hmph! I am a fatalist! What is to be, will be, I guess."

"But . . . supposing that . . . that one of those things hit you?" pointing to the grenade. "And . . . killed you?"

"What of it? Supposing my body was put out of commission, what would it matter? I would have done my little 'bit' anyway, and that is the main thing. Duty and principle are of more consequence to me than this hulk of flesh." He put the grenade on the table.

Mrs. Cogan gazed at him in wonderment. Albeit she was a regular attendant at the Episcopal Church a few blocks away, and, theoretically, subscribed to the high ideal of the Christ teaching, she could not quite understand her brother's point of view; it was beyond her. Physical life with its joys and happiness; her home, husband, and child; all were too dear and precious to her. "Duty" and "Principle" were all

very well, but . . . to willingly face danger—and such danger!—with the possibility of losing one's life for, what were to her, abstractions; that was something she did not care to contemplate. She would not allow any such considerations to enter into *her* scheme of things.

"Your point of view may be all right,—that is, for *you*," she answered; "*but for me . . no!* Life is far too sweet and lovely; too full of promise of future happiness for me to wish to give it up for any dreary, abstract notions.

Her brother smiled scornfully. He had heard the same or similar sentiments from men whom he despised for their narrowness; and while he realized that his sister was of an intensely physical loving type, he was sorry to find that her horizon of life was so small. Fumbling in his grip, he sorrowfully reflected on the puny orbit the average person travelled in. Finding what he was seeking—a small leather case, he opened it and held it out for his sister to see what was inside;—his *Croix de Guerre*, the French medal for bravery on the field of battle.

"Oh! Isn't that beautiful!" she exclaimed in a low voice.

"As metal it is worth, at most, a couple of dollars; but as a symbol of *duty* performed, *principle* upheld, foolish abstract notions as you call them, its value cannot be expressed in terms of money. It represents the highest and noblest attributes of a nation!"

She read the inscription on the reverse side. "My! You must feel immensely proud to have won it."

Her brother made a gesture of deprecation. "It was my luck to have the chance, and I happened to get away with it,"—meaning his exploit. "Any of the boys could have done the same thing, if they had had the opportunity. Lots of fellows, a damn sight braver and better than I'll ever be, are sleeping their last sleep out there . . . without medals. Some without even a headstone to mark their grave."

Hearing Harold's voice in the adjoining room, his mother called him to come and see his uncle's medal. Jack took the Cross out of its case, pinned it on the child's blouse, then placed his little chubby hand to his curly head in the attitude of the military salute. Drawing himself up to his full height, Jack saluted and boomed out in his mellow voice: "*Vive la France!*" The child smiled from beneath the steel helmet, as though he understood the import of the words, and made a lisping attempt to repeat the phrase.

His mother threw herself on her knees impulsively, and gathering the child into her arms, pressed him convulsively to her heaving bosom.

"Oh, Jack!" she wailed. "Please don't put those ideas into his head! I know that many mothers have given their boys to their country, but I . . . I couldn't, couldn't give up my boy for anything! No, not for all the medals in the world. It would break my heart!"

She closed her eyes as if to shut out even the thought of such a possibility, and covered the child's face and hair with hot kisses.

"That is the mother instinct, I suppose," retorted

Jack, with some heat; "but if I had a son, I would prefer having him die for the sacred cause of liberty and principle, than see him live the life of a coward and shirker!"

Mrs. Cogan gently unclasped the medal, and handed it to her brother. "I wouldn't give my boy for fifty medals! I may be selfish, but my boy means too much to me. He means life itself! If he were taken away from me—which God forbid!—I'd be tempted to do away with myself; for I couldn't live without him! Anyway"—blinking the tears out of her eyes —"you'd better put it back in its case before it gets scratched or damaged."

While aware that his sister was of a very passionate type, with a strong love of kindred and home, he had not, hitherto, known how much her child meant to her. Now, the blood surging through her temples, her eyes blazing with a look of combat, she seemed like a tigress at bay defending her young; and he realized that he had touched a part of her nature until now unknown to him. He dimly appreciated her assertion that the loss of her child would mean the loss of everything worth living for; and though he could not feel fully in sympathy with her attitude, he felt sorry that the conversation had got to the point of distressing her. To break the tension, he suggested taking the child out for a stroll.

"I want a whiff of air, anyway, and the walk will do us good. What do you say, kiddo? Will you come for a walk with Unkie?"

The boy acquiesced joyfully, and ran out, at the

suggestion of his mother, to the servant to have his face washed.

"He needs some exercise," said Mrs. Cogan; "and while you are out I'll get these things straightened out a bit. Tom won't be long now."

Her brother moved leisurely toward the door, where he paused; then went back to one of his trunks. He brought out a small packet wrapped in oil-cloth, and came to where his sister was arranging the souvenirs on the table.

"This is something I brought specially for you, Kitty," he said, slowly. "I thought that *you* would like to have it," significantly.

"You dear boy! What is it?"

"All that remains of my mascot. It was always with me wherever I went—next to my heart; in danger and out of danger."

"Can I open it now? I am curious to know what it is, because it will mean such a lot to me."

"I hope so," he replied gravely.

He bent forward suddenly, and kissed her lips; then strode out of the room. Full of strange, vague tremors—how oddly he had acted—she slipped the string off and opened the packet; disclosing to her view the tattered remnants of a small silk American Flag, stained with blood.

The oil-cloth covering dropped to the floor when she opened the folds of the emblem of her country. She noted the jagged rents; the holes—some cleanly cut as if by bullets, others with the edges discolored

by burning; the blood-stains. Her eyes filled with tears.

"His flag!" she whispered. "His blood!"

She began folding it reverently when an impulse made her look toward a framed water-color picture of her child, Harold, hanging on the wall. Her bosom rose and fell with suppressed emotion. She sank into a chair and, bowing her head over her crossed arms on the table, sobbed out the words:

"*My boy! My boy!*"

VIII

Benton, the actor,—of whom we have seen nothing since the incident of Waller's refusal to shake hands with him on the liner,—owing to the fact that his name began with a "B," had been one of the first to have his baggage examined and passed by the Customs Officers; consequently, he was on his way to his hotel long before Waller had made his triumphal exit down the pier.

Immediately after his luncheon, Benton dressed himself in all his finery, and proceeded to that section of Broadway known as "The Rialto;" where actors and actresses who were "resting" (to use the technical theatrical term—which in plain English means "unemployed") promenaded the sidewalks, or lounged in groups on the corners diverting each other with their favorite pastime of blowing their own horns. "Throwing the bull"—as they say on Broadway.

Talma, the great French actor, once remarked that acting was the most evanescent of the arts. The actor's speech is no sooner uttered than it is gone, and has become only a memory. The actor, knowing this, on the stage does not employ the usual conversational tones of social life; his speech is what we

have come to know as, and label, "theatric," and he enlarges the volume of his tones so that they can reach all his audience.

The actor—and actress—out of a job, on Broadway, carries this tonal amplification to an extent probably never dreamed of by Talma.

When he meets some of his fellow thespians (who are full of the same consuming desire to unbosom themselves) he proceeds to acquaint them of the magnificent newspaper notices telling how he "stopped the show" in Denver, or made the audience in Chicago "sit up and take notice," or the "repeated vociferous curtain calls"—"a round dozen of 'em, my boy!"—in 'Frisco. Realizing that his tones must reach all his audience,—with the added realization that his hearers (in this instance) are exceedingly sophisticated, and will deduct at least fifty per cent from his statement, —he adds to his utterance an exuberance and wealth of decorative detail that would do credit to a motion picture advertising agent. If his estimate of himself as an actor were taken, even with a fifty per cent reduction, the great outstanding fact of him being a greater actor than Irving, Booth or Kean ever thought of being, would be apparent to the dullest of intellects.

As he leisurely strolled down Broadway, Benton glanced at the groups of actors and actresses as he passed, expecting to see an old friend or acquaintance who recognized him, so that he, too, could do his share of blowing his own horn; an avocation he was past-master of, and for which at the present

time he was well primed. As he went by, the actors out of work turned and looked after him, full of curiosity. They recognized the unmistakable air of the professional actor, but not knowing him, wondered who he was.

Five years is a long time to be absent from any place. More especially from Broadway, where the kaleidoscope of life changes over-night—almost; where theatrical reputations are a mushroom growth, here today in full bloom, tomorrow, withered and forgotten; where the divorcée of last year gives place to the hero or heroine of this year's scandal; where paint and powder hide the ravages of age and sin, and gorgeous dresses bought on credit hide breaking hearts; where the glittering, scintillating frivolities distract the attention from the pestiferous, soul-destroying rottenness underneath. Broadway! the greatest street in the greatest city of the greatest country on earth! Broadway! where one can find the oldest church and the newest vice; the highest building and the lowest degeneracy; the largest theatre and the worst performances; the noblest actions and the most uncouth manners; the best examples of the Caucasian race and the worst specimens of the Oriental; the highest and the lowest types of humanity. Broadway! The Great White Way of Bohemia! *White* with the *corpses* of its victims; both the *quick* and the *dead!*

Even though Benton was well aware that his progress was followed by curious and questioning glances, which somewhat soothed his *amour propre*, neverthe-

less, he felt considerably put out to find that he was not recognized; he, the former matinée idol of all America, not to say anything of London and Paris. All the *big* people must be out of town! Who were these dubs, anyway, that evidently did not know that he was the well known Karl Benton to whom the theatrical world of the metropolis had given a great send-off in the shape of a swell banquet at the hotel Rector; and at which all the leading lights of the theatrical, literary, and artistic professions had been present? It was unbelievable that they did not recognize him. His portraits were known well enough for everybody to remember him! His gorge began to rise at the thought of it, when the overweening vanity which was his main characteristic asserted itself. He chuckled quietly to himself when the true inwardness of the situation revealed itself to him.

"Why, of course! That is the reason. How stupid of me!" He simpered gleefully. "They know who I am, so they don't wish to take the liberty of bowing to me. They naturally expect me to nod to them first." He set his shoulders further back, and felt to see if the big diamond, that shone like the headlight on a locomotive, in his necktie was in place.

Relieved and gratified at finding what he imagined was the solution of the matter, he was about to salute a group of actors when a short, fat man with a decided Hebraic cast of features came out of the Claridge Grill and crossed his path, almost stepping on his toes in his hurry.

"Beg pardon . . ." the fat man wheezed, glancing

at Benton. He stopped short in his apology and peered through his thick glasses. They recognized each other.

"Hello, Karl!" wheezed the fat one as he pump-handled the actor's hand. "Why, where in the world did you come from? I haven't seen you in a dog's age. Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Why, blest if it isn't Solly Marks!" exclaimed Benton, in his most orotund tones. "I have just got in from the big village—London," he added when he saw Marks' look of inquiry.

"Is that so! You've been away some time, ain't you?"

"All of five years. On a world's tour," replied the actor, raising his voice so that everybody within half a block could hear; "and a particularly successful tour. Do you know, in London and Paris we . . . "

Marks knew the actors' failing only too well, and not wishing to waste his valuable time listening to Benton's recital of his triumphs, cut him short by asking: "And what's on the cards now?"

Benton frowned at the interruption. To be cut off just as he was getting into his stride!

"Haven't quite made up my mind yet," was his curt response. "If I can find a good play to suit me, why . . ." He threw out his chest and smiled enigmatically.

"Gee, Karl, it's lucky I met you! I've got just the thing. With a part made for you. Fits you like the paper on the wall!"

"Yaas? That's what they all say!" drawled Benton.

"No, really, Karl; that's straight."

"All right. Some time when I have nothing to do, I'll step in and give it the once over." He started to walk on.

"Wait a minnit!" Marks grabbed his arm. "Wait a minnit, can't you? I tell you I've got the very thing you want. We'll go right over to my office" —he pointed across the street to the Putnam Building —"and I'll show it to you."

The actor looked doubtful, but Marks with the business acumen of his race, linked his arm in Benton's and steered him across Times Square.

Arrived in his office, Marks brought out his box of special cigars, a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. "To drink 'good luck' to your happy return," he wheezed.

The actor made himself comfortable in a large easy chair, and while he languidly pulled off his yellow colored gloves, Marks opened the safe to get the manuscript of the play.

Handing it to Benton, he remarked, "This is a chance of a lifetime, Karl. It's by a new man who don't know the game." The actor looked at him with a disgusted expression. "The *business end* of it, I mean," grinned Marks. "He is so dead anxious to see his name on a programme, we can get it for a song."

"Hmf!" the actor grunted. "The songs you get for nix are generally not worth singing."

"But not in this case, believe me," wheezed Marks hastily, mopping his forehead. "The stuff is there, really good; full of new business and clever lines. Best I've seen for a long time."

Benton having first helped himself to a liberal four fingers of whiskey, leisurely opened the manuscript, and read the title page.

"'*The Folly of a Fool,—A Comedy,*'" he read out in rolling tones. "Hm! good title anyway. '*By Tom Cogan.*' Who the hell's Tom Cogan? I never heard of him before."

"Now you just skim over it while I go and see what these slaves of mine are doin'," advised Marks.

He disappeared through the doorway, wheezing as he went, leaving the actor to his reading while he in the adjoining room, saw to it that his employés (his slaves, as he jocularly, but truthfully, called them) attended to their duties, and did not waste any more time than he could prevent.

As Mr. Solomon Marks plays but a minor part in this drama, suffice it to say that his business consisted of selling stage and motion picture plays, providing acts for the vaudeville houses, also actors and actresses for motion picture companies; in short, anything and everything along the lines of theatrical business by which he could turn an honest penny.

He was fond of remarking: "A Jew can be as honest as the next man, can't he? It's only these damned shysters and such "schwein" which are crooks! And the rest of us Jews have to stand for the blame." Then he would draw a few wheezy breaths (he had

fatty degeneration of the heart) before he continued: "I'm out for the coin like the rest of the bunch, so I don't pay more for the thing than I have to; but when I make a bargain I stick to it, even if I lose money on it." Which, of course, was not often; he carefully saw to that end of the deal. But, as he claimed: he did stick to his bargain; and that is saying a lot—nowadays. More than can be said of some of the Jews' detractors.

When Marks thought Benton had had enough time to get interested in the manuscript, he returned quietly to the room where the actor was sitting, engrossed in the play; and whose experienced eye saw that here at last was the kind of play he had always hoped to find. While every part was good, with clever ideas, the principal part—the "lead"—which he would play —stood out unmistakably from the rest. It was a corker! Full of "fat," sparkling with witty lines and surprisingly new situations, the whole comedy was the best he had read in many a long day.

"Well? Didn't I tell you I'd got the stuff for you?" Marks inquired gleefully, noting the pleased expression on the actor's face.

"Hm . . . I don't know," drawled Benton dubiously. He was too experienced a business man to let Marks think he liked it so much that he would be willing to pay any fancy price for it. He, too, believed in not paying any more for an article than was absolutely necessary; so, like other clever business men, he proceeded to find faults in the article for sale.

"D'you see . . . most of the situations are old stuff

. . . revamped; and the lead is only so-so. A lot of it would have to be re-written, the scenes changed and . . ."

"Ah, say, old man, cut out the flub-dub! Let's get down to brass tacks," wheezed Marks irritably; he had read the signs on the actor's face too unerringly to be taken in by his objections. He, too, was a business man, and a very much better business man than Benton. It was waste of good time to try to fool him!

"I read that a week ago to the missus," he continued. "She used to read for Frohman, so I guess she knows a thing or two about plays; been reading 'em for about ten years. And say, she nearly laughed herself sick! She wanted me to borrow some money and put it on myself; but my hands are full enough as it is right now."

Benton calmly helped himself to some whiskey. "Say, Solly, you're all right—can't beat you! You can talk with the best of them. You certainly have imagination, if nothing else," he said, with a sarcastic sneer.

Marks prided himself on giving everybody a square deal—so he said, and the actor's insinuation made him frown.

"All right, Karl, if you think I am telling lies to you we won't waste any more time chewin' the rag." He reached out for the manuscript; he was no mean actor himself. "I know a man that'll jump at that play, and he'll be in town in a day or so; indeed, I was keeping it for him."

"Who is he?" the actor inquired, keeping his grip on the manuscript.

"De Fox Trotter!"

"Ho, ho! That long-legged stiff?" he sneered. "Why, he couldn't play that part in a thousand years!"

"Oh, I don't know!" drawled Marks.

"Well, I do know!" replied Benton hotly. "Why, that part is full of good stuff that Trotter wouldn't know how to handle. He hasn't the delicacy of touch; the figure; the . . ."

"Trotter has done some mighty clever work," wheezed Marks, slyly. "You got to hand it to 'im."

"The hell he has!" snarled the actor, allowing his professional jealousy to run away with his discretion. "F'rinstance: what could he do with this clever bit where the lead is jollying the old dame? Huh! He'd make a rotten hash of it. And what kind of a mess would he make of this other peach of a situation, where the lead is making love to the . . ."

He stopped, and bit his lip. Seeing Marks' amused smile at his enthusiasm for the clever situations in the comedy, he suddenly realized that he was contradicting his own previous objections.

"Now look here, Karl," said Marks, seating himself on the table, and pouring out a drink for the actor; "Trotter could get a whole lot out of that part, and he'd make a big hit in it—you know that as well as I can tell you; but I'll admit that you are better fitted for it than him. If it had been written specially for you, it couldn't be a better fit. I can hear that funny cackle of yours, with your one eye half closed, jollying the old skirt about the young feller; gad! it would bring down the house! And when the old duck is telling you his troubles with his young wife—the girl

you are monkeying with; gee! they'd hear the yells of laughin' down at the Battery!"

Marks looked ingratiatingly at the actor. He knew his weakness to a dot. Benton swelled up under the praise which was the nectar of life to him, and lazily turned the pages as if undecided.

"We ain't kids no more," Marks went on. "You know as well as I do that is as good a play as you've seen; and you'd make a smashin' hit in it. Now say 'yes' or 'no,' 'cause I've got an appointment with Archie Stormbanks." He pulled out his gold watch significantly.

"Hm. That's another comedian," mused the actor. "Perhaps he is after a comedy for the moving pictures."

Marks, seeing his hesitancy, held out his hand for the manuscript.

The actor saw that he had come to the crucial point. "How much does he want for it?"

"He don't know himself; but if you offered to buy it outright, without royalties, I think he'd fall for it." Marks grinned.

The actor's eyes glistened at the thought of getting the play without paying author's royalties—which, of course, would go into his own pockets,—and he wondered what was the lowest figure he could safely offer without spoiling his chance of buying it.

"Well, what d'you say?"

"What do you think of five hundred for it?" Benton ventured.

Marks thought of the slim commission on five hundred dollars, also of some notes falling due in a few

days. He sighed heavily, and looked reproachfully at the actor.

"You musta made a big wad on your tower. You oughter get a guardian so that you won't spend it foolishly; you are so generous!" he sneered.

"Well! What do you think would be a fair offer?" asked the actor sullenly. "You must remember that some of this stuff is amateurish, and I'll have to whip it into shape."

"Offer him one thousand cash for all the rights," Marks advised; "and you give me two hundred for my commish. You'll make that in less than two weeks if it's a go. Besides, you can sell it for a big chunk of money to the movie crowd when you get tired of it."

"You must have your pound of flesh, I 'spose," said the actor with a curl of his thin lip.

"Sure! Betcher life!" wheezed Marks. "I never did believe in that vegetarian diet gag; not for me! It might be O.K. for some people; but eatin' grass never appealed to me as a steady diet. Roast duck with savoury stuffin',—oyster stuffin', and the usual trimmin's, with a coupla glasses of champagne, and a good Havana to finish off; suits me much better." He licked his lips, and his eyes glistened.

"All right. It's a go! But . . . don't forget that's on condition I can alter some of it to suit myself. Be sure and get that in the contract; otherwise, it's all off."

Marks seized the 'phone, and, making the connection, said in a caressing tone, "This you, Mr. Cogan?" Hearing the editor's big voice replying in the affirma-

tive, he continued, "Well, this is Marks talking . . . yeh, Solly Marks . . . Quite well, thank you. Well, now . . . I don't want to give you any false hopes, but . . . I *think* that I may be able to place your comedy; that is, if you are reasonable about it." Cogan wanted to know what he meant by 'reasonable.' "Well . . . you know how it is. People are afraid to take a chance on an unknown man . . . a new author, and . . ." Cogan interrupted with the guess that all authors must have been, at some time or other, unknown. "Yes, yes, of course," agreed Marks hastily; "but you know how it is in your own business. An unknown has to accept less than a man who has made a name."

The wily agent paused to allow his remark to sink into Cogan's mind, and so prepare him for the proposition he was about to make.

"Well now, liss'n. If you'll agree to sell the play outright, after making a few changes to suit the leadin' man, I think . . . I only *think*, mind you, perhaps I can get as much as one thousand dollars for it . . . *cash!* which would be doin' pretty good for a beginner. Of course, if the play is a hit, your rep will be made, and . . . why . . . all the managers in town will be chasin' you for other plays; and . . . well . . . you know the rest. You can buy all the furs and cutglass for your wife you want to!"

Cogan kicked at losing the royalties; for, as he pointed out to the wheezy agent at the other end of the wire, if the play was a hit, it was only fair that he should benefit from it.

"I quite agree with you, Cogan," wheezed Marks,

"but that is the rule in the profession; because the producer is taking a big risk with an unknown man. He stands to lose every cent he puts in the production, while you have one thousand iron men in cash. I know more about these things than you, so I advise you to take the offer. It may be months and months before I will get any manager interested enough to read it, and by that time some other guy may come along with the same ideas; and then where are you?"

He listened to the editor's answer with a smile, and nodded significantly to Benton who was near the phone, trying to catch the conversation. "All right, then. Suppose you run over here tomorrow afternoon, and meet the man I'm dickerin' with . . Yes, four-thirty will suit me . . . Goodbye." He hung up the receiver.

"It's as good as sold, I guess," he grinned, turning to the actor. "He's a bit leary on the royalties question, but if you flash some real, honest-to-goodness money under his nose, he may forget all about 'em; he's so anxious to get it produced."

IX.

That evening, after the greetings were over, and Jack by dint of much coaxing had told of the incident that had gained him a medal and a wounded arm, Cogan surprised them with the good news of the possibility of his selling his play. and of it being performed on Broadway.

"So you see, Jack, old top," he said with a jovial slam on his brother-in-law's back, "you'll not be the only one to be famous! We have read in the newspapers of your exploits and heroism; before you go back to France, you may see my name in the 'poipers' as the writer of a successful play."

"Bully for you! I sincerely hope we shall, old fellow; and if it is put on the boards before my time expires, I'll see to it that all my old college pals will be there on the opening night. They'll yell the roof off! We'll have one of the old-time jamborees!"

Mrs. Cogan was delighted with the news, and got up from her chair to throw her arms around her husband's neck and kiss him.

"If anyone deserves to win out, you certainly do! Lord knows," she declared to Jack, "he has worked hard enough for it. Up until the small hours of the morning; night after night. No wonder he is ner-

vous and irritable; the dear old thing!" She seated herself on the arm of her husband's chair, and pulled his head on to her shoulder.

"Ho, ho! Isn't it strange how we humans slave and wear ourselves out; and for what? Baubles! Bubbles!" Jack mused in a dreamy tone.

"Hmph! Those baubles and bubbles are necessary to spur us on to do things. I have yet to find the man who is willing to work just for the pleasure it gives him," laughed Cogan. "Blest if I'd slave as I do; but I have to. Necessity is a hard taskmaster."

"Sometimes," said Jack, leaning back in his chair, and gazing at the smoke-rings above his head, "when I'd be sitting all by my lonesome at an outpost sheltered from the cold, biting wind by a few rocks and some brushwood; wrapped in my big coat, trying to keep the heat in my body by breathing deep breaths rapidly; dead with fatigue, yet having to keep awake so as to watch that friend Fritz, who was probably doing the same stunt, didn't get the jump on me, I often used to think how foolish and how childish our actions were."

Cogan and his wife looked curiously at him.

"Here are you, Tom, looking forward to making a big splurge with your play; and what will it amount to after all? Some applause from your fellows, a few extra shekels, and in fifty years more or less Tom Cogan the successful dramatist will be forgotten!"

"My word, but you are some little consoler, Jack!" laughed his sister.

Cogan burst in with, "If nothing else comes of it, the shekels will come in mighty handy, believe muh!"

"Perhaps so," Jack replied. "Don't imagine for a moment that I want to throw cold water on your enthusiasm," he added hastily.

"I am feeling pretty good tonight, old scout," Cogan said, cheerfully, puffing contentedly at his cigar. "I can stand a lot of pessimism just now."

"No, no, old man; I don't mean it that way at all; quite the reverse, I assure you."

"Very well; *tres bien.* Go ahead. Shoot!" Cogan laughed, and snuggled closer to his wife.

"As I was saying: when I was squatting there, looking up at the great expanse of blue-black sky above me, studded with stars,—some of them suns bigger than our sun, and probably with planets, worlds like ours, swinging round in their orbits,—trying to realize that the *Great Bear* had been there when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt; that *Orion* and the *Pleiades* were shining above me just as they did when old boil-bedevilled Job recorded the fact; the great (and to me) significant fact was borne in on me that we are not merely little, miserable sinners, bugs crawling on the earth's bosom, but that we are necessary cogs in the wheels of the great Cosmic Machine. That our actions, childish and trifling as in many ways they seem to be, are, in reality, important parts in the great World Drama, and vital to the whole Cosmic Scheme and Design."

Cogan glanced with a look of inquiry at his wife. She gave a slight tilt of her shoulders; she had no idea what her brother was driving at. Jack struck a match to relight his cigar.

"I am afraid I cannot follow you very far along

those lines, old sport," Cogan remarked. "I've been kept so busy with my nose to the grindstone, trying to keep the wolf from the door, that . . ." Jack looked up at the pause, ". . . I don't know how to put it in so many words, but . . .well . . . one world is enough for me to think about at a time. I've all I can do to attend to the matters of this world, without bothering about the next. Time enough for that when I get there."

"But suppose that the kind of life we shall experience in the next world wholly depended on our actions in this world; what then?"

"Hey, Jack," interposed his sister, "what is all this? Have you 'got religion'—as they say down South?"

"Oh, no. At least, not in the sense of having joined a church, or subscribing to any particular creed." Then he awoke to the fact that Cogan and his wife were eyeing him curiously. "But perhaps I am boring you with this kind of chatter."

His sister laughed merrily. "You are not boring me, boysie; but it sounds so strange coming from you. You never struck me as being of a religious turn of mind. Indeed"—remembering his college career—"rather the reverse. A good bit of a harum-scarem kind of scamp, in fact."

Jack joined in the laugh at his expense. "Perfectly true! I know what you are hinting at. I suppose being at the front has changed my point of view a bit. I'm sure my old Professor would be as much astonished at the change as you are."

"I guess you've seen things out there that would

make some interesting reading," Cogan suggested, trying to change the conversation.

"Yes," replied Jack, reminiscently. "It was something I saw that gave me my new point of view. It has altered my whole attitude to life."

The editor brightened up. Though he had tried to hide it, he had been rather bored by the trend of his brother-in-law's previous remarks; now, expecting to hear of some exciting accounts of whirlwind attacks, of hand-to-hand encounters—perhaps of Jack's own personal conflicts, he bit off the end of a fresh cigar, and settled himself in his chair in eager anticipation.

"Go ahead. Tell us, Jack; it ought to be very interesting."

"As you have probably read accounts of unwounded men being sent for a holiday to Paris and even to London—anywhere from the front—to give their nerves a rest, you may have dimly conceived what a tremendous strain the boys are undergoing. But however vivid your imagination may be, it is not equal to picturing the real conditions. One's nerves are strung taut almost to breaking point, not with the *doing* of things but with the waiting; the tense watchfulness; the expectation of what *may* happen next."

Cogan gave a nod of understanding.

"One calm magnificent night! Not a breath of air moving. Hardly a sound except the low whispers of some of the men on duty, and the muffled sounds of the heavy breathing of those who were sleeping, dead tired, in the dugout. I was leaning against the side of the trench, doing sentry duty; my head be-

tween two sandbags on the parapet—watching. The sector had been unaccountably quiet for the last two days, and past experiences led the command to suspect that the Hun was up to some new devilment or other; probably a raid. Every one of my senses keyed up to the limit, I was straining my eyes peering through the thin mist rising from the damp waste of ground in front of me, every now and then almost convinced that I could see forms moving toward our lines; only to discover that it was a deception due to the moving mist winding around the objects out there on No Man's Land, and giving them the appearance of movement. Absorbed in the watching, I lost all sense of time. I cannot say how long I was standing there, but . . . all at once . . . a peculiar, indefinable feeling came over me! I cannot explain it, but . . . the whole scene seemed strangely familiar to me; as if what I was doing was a repetition of the same thing done sometime before! As a matter of fact, this was the first time I was on guard, and my first experience in the trenches."

"Dickens speaks of a somewhat similar experience when he was leaning over the side of a bridge in Florence; or perhaps it was in Rome—I forget which," Cogan remarked with a knowing air to his wife.

"Literature is full of examples of similar accounts," agreed Jack. "Well . . . the thought came into my mind: why should all these men in our, and the enemy's trenches be here? Speaking for myself, I had no hate in my heart for any particular Fritz who,

in his trench, was fighting for what he thought was his duty to his Fatherland. Yet, here we were—he and I—trying to outguess each other, so that one of us could kill the other! If we hadn't uniforms on, probably we would have shaken hands, thrown down our rifles, called it off, and gone back to our homes and more peaceful pursuits."

"Hmph! The Germans are fighting because they are a lot of thick-skulled fatheads, willing to be bossed by a megalomaniac of a degenerate Kaiser and a bunch of aristocratic Junkers who order them to fight; whether they want to or not," interjected Cogan with a snort. "The Allies are fighting for freedom; democracy against autocracy! Making the world free for democracy!"

"Yes . . . I know all the arguments on both sides," replied Jack, smiling, "and I am aware that all the right isn't all on one side. There are two sides to every question, you know."

"There are not two sides to this question," declared Cogan, his fighting blood up. "There is only one side, and that is: the Germans are an arrogant, conceited, pigheaded race of beer-swillers who think their *Kultur* is the best ever; which they want to inflict on the rest of the human race, to force it down our necks, whether we want it or don't want it!"

"It has some good points, don't you think? Things we would do well to imitate in our own country."

"Yes, it has . . . not!" exploded Cogan. "More especially the raping of young girls and children, murdering defenceless old men and women, inoculating

their unfortunate prisoners with tuberculosis germs, crucifying Canadians, destroying cathedrals. Hell! What is the need of repeating the list of their deviltries; you ought to know more about all that than I can tell you."

"There you go, starting an argument as usual," protested Mrs. Cogan; "when I want to hear what Jack was going to tell us."

"Sorry I butted in, old girl," apologized Cogan. "Go ahead with your yarn, old man. Damn it! I can't help getting hot under the collar when I think of those Prussian devils!"

Jack smiled indulgently; he knew what a firebrand his brother-in-law was.

"As I was saying:—Thoughts along those lines were chasing through my head when . . . suddenly . . . the grey mist wasn't there . . . but . . . a large picture . . . in color; just as if a colored moving picture had been suddenly thrown on the atmosphere. Indeed, I was so surprised, I turned to see if there was a moving picture outfit behind me. Of course, there wasn't; but when I turned again, the picture was there in front of me!"

"A picture? How strange!" his sister ejaculated.

"I blinked my eyes, thinking it was some optical illusion due to the movement of the rising mist, and closed them for a second or so; but when I opened them again, there was this immense picture in front of me."

"What an extraordinary thing!" was Mrs. Cogan's

comment. "What could it have been? Have you any idea?"

"Oh, some kind of hallucination, probably," said Cogan, "due to nervous tension and overstrained eyes."

"Can you remember what it looked like?" his sister asked, all excitement. "Can you describe it, Jack?"

"Oh, yes. I shall never forget it!" He threw his cigar stump into the ash-tray; then, with eyes almost closed, leaned back in his chair.

"I seemed to be at a height, looking down on a vast crowd of excited men and women standing in front of a large temple. At least, I got the impression it was a temple. It may have been some other kind of a public building, for it had enormous columns, and a number of broad steps leading up to the entrance. At the foot of the steps were large braziers of, I should say, bronze, out of which arose thick smoke. It may seem strange,—I must confess it did to me at the time,—but I could actually smell the smoke. It smelled like incense, and I suppose that was why I thought the place was a temple. I couldn't see the upper part of the building—it seemed to fade into obscurity. The whole picture looked fuzzy at the edges . . . Sort of out of focus. The people, who were shouting and yelling like mad,—a regular Babel,—were dressed after the fashion of the ancient Greeks or Romans; but I somehow felt—I cannot explain how or why—that they were not of either of those nations. There was a sort of Oriental touch about them that you don't find in either the Greeks or the Romans."

"Were they Egyptians, do you think?" his sister asked, looking wise.

"You are way off, Kitty," laughed her husband. "Egyptians did not dress like the Greeks or Romans. More likely to be Carthaginians."

"Strange to say, that was the impression I got," Jack replied. "And right here, let me say that I don't know how certain impressions came to me, nor do I know *why* they impressed me as being true; nevertheless, I seemed to know positively that those impressions were veritable *facts;* facts beyond all argument and cavil."

"Some old forgotten pictures lying dormant in your sub-conscious memory, probably, which under the strain of your intense concentration, came to the surface of your normal consciousness," suggested Cogan, who had a superficial acquaintance with the jargon of the "psychologists."

"I cannot say," Jack replied. "I don't remember having seen any such picture. Certainly not one that moved as this one did, with the sound of voices, and the smell of incense coming out of it."

"The sounds may have been the general result of the sounds around you, and the smell may have been due to something burning in the dugout or some such place," insisted Cogan.

"I hardly think so," replied Jack, dreamily.

"Don't interrupt, Tom," Mrs. Cogan advised in a low tone. Her husband smiled and patted her hand.

"At the bottom of the temple steps was a large bronze table where men in armor were sitting; also

some standing . . . Looked like officials in command. A number of youths about twelve to sixteen years old, stood in a line which extended from the table to somewhere in the distance; the other end lost in the crowd . . . The youths were being drafted into the army."

"The last draft, as it were," chimed in the irrepressible Cogan.

His brother-inlaw nodded. "Yes. It was the call for the last reserves—the boys . . . I seemed to knew one of them, intimately. When his name was taken, and he was given what appeared to be a bronze coin or tag, he rushed to a girl about his own age, who was sobbing as though her heart would break, at the outskirts of the crowd."

"His sweetheart, of course," explained Mrs. Cogan, smiling.

"The plot thickens!" her husband hissed dramatically. "But don't interrupt, Kitty."

Unheeding the interruption, Jack continued: "I somehow knew that, although dressed in a feminine costume, the figure was really a boy disguised as a girl; and that he was, by that method, evading the call to arms . . . I seemed to know, too, that the elder youth was not only conniving at the deception, but that he was responsible for it . . . He loved his young brother so much, he did not want him to risk losing his life: hence the disguise to fool the authorities."

"Oh! it was his brother. How very interesting!" Mrs. Cogan exclaimed.

The husband stifled a yawn to remark: "Huh! There were slackers and shirkers in those days, too!"

"The remarkable part of it was this:— While I was, apparently, *looking* at the scene,—as a spectator, —yet, at the same time, *I knew and felt that I was the boy in the girl's costume!*"

Cogan laughed goodhumoredly. "You must have fallen asleep and had a dream."

"No! I was wide awake. To assure myself that I was *not* asleep, I turned to look at the fellows moving about in the trench. Indeed, I actually pinched my leg to see if I was really awake."

"How absurd!" cried his sister laughing merrily.

"Yes, it does sound absurd now," conceded her brother; "but at the time it was very real I assure you."

"Was that all?" inquired Cogan, who was feeling sleepy.

"No. The scene seemed to dissolve suddenly into another one, and this time I wasn't so much a spectator as an actor. I was in the picture itself; part and parcel of it . . . I cannot explain it, but there was I, *dressed in armor*, in a sort of trench— or ditch, rather—with a long lance or spear in my hand, on guard, watching the enemy; while at my feet, on the ground, was my brother of the first vision—desperately wounded!"

"How did you get there after being left at home, disguised as a girl, evading the draft?" his sister wanted to know.

"I got the impression that I had felt ashamed of dodging my duty, and had been drafted into the

regiment—or Legion, as it was called—to which my brother belonged . . . Somehow I knew, too, that I had been in great danger of losing my life, and that my brother had got his wounds while rescuing me from the enemy . . . He had sacrificed himself for me!"

"'Greater love hath no man than this,'" Mrs. Cogan quoted under her breath, "'that a man lay down his life for his friends.'"

Jack looked keenly at his sister, as though to read her thoughts.

"And now! Now for the dénouement! The climax! The triumph of duty, virtue, and courage over . . . mm . . . what shall I say?" Cogan yawned.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cogan in a dreamy voice. "What was the outcome?"

"Somebody tapped me on my arm. It was the relief to take my place, so that I could have forty winks . . . I nodded to him, then turned to take another look at the picture—for I wanted to see the end of it; but it was gone! . . . Nothing there but the faint light of the dawn coming over the plain; shimmering through the mist to herald the coming of another day."

"Gone?" his sister echoed. "Oh! . . . how disappointing!"

Jack nodded slowly as he looked into her eyes with an inquiring look. "Yes . . . gone!"

His sister returned his look with a faraway, dreamy expression on her face; as though the narrative had evoked some vague, long-forgotten memories.

"I wonder if he died of his wounds, or . . . did he recover?" she murmured slowly.

"I don't know," replied Jack . . . "I wish I did!"

"Huh! It is very evident that you are not a writer of fiction, Jack," Cogan cried, shaking himself awake; "for you work up to a climax, and instead of 'to be continued in our next,' you leave the story 'unfinished.' "

Jack smiled with a reminiscent air. "Can't be helped, old chap. I've given it just as it happened. What the continuation is, if it has one, I cannot say; for I don't know—worse luck!"

He had told them that the boy disguised in girl's clothing, and later—in the trench—in armor, in the two visions of what purported to be scenes of a past incarnation, was himself. He noted that they had not asked if he knew who the *other* boy—the elder brother—was. He was about to draw their attention to the matter (for he saw that his sister was lost in deep thought) when Cogan, now yawning in undisguised fashion, remarked:

"I guess I'll go to bed! I have had a strenuous day, and feel tired out. I'll bet you can do with a good night's sleep, too, Jack." He got up lazily, stretched his arms, and yawned audibly.

The spell that Jack's tale had woven around Mrs. Cogan, and in which she was sitting, dreamy-eyed, was broken by her husband's action. She sighed, as though awakening from some pleasant dream.

"I wonder what was the continuation; what the end of the story was," she mused aloud.

"The continuation, old girl, is: 'Tomorrow's another day,'" gaped Cogan.

Getting up slowly, Mrs. Cogan glanced at her brother to see how her husband's jocularity affected him.

Jack smiled cheerfully. "Tom is quite right! Tomorrow's another day." His thoughts still occupied with the scenes of his visions, he continued. dreamily, "Yes . . . tomorrow is another day . . . that is the continuation!" With which cryptic utterance Mrs. Cogan had to be content.

Feeling rather disappointed that his sister did not inquire as to the identity of the elder brother, somehow—the reason not being clear—he couldn't bring himself to ask her if she did not wish to know. The time came, a few weeks later, when he uttered a prayer of thankfulness for her *not* having asked the question.

X.

At the appointed hour the next afternoon, Cogan was in Marks' office talking over the details of the sale and alterations of his play. Cogan having arrived ahead of Benton, Marks took the opportunity to point out the benefits which would accrue to the play—and the author—by having an actor of Benton's experience collaborate with him.

"You know, Mr. Cogan, this feller I've got int'rested is a tip-top actor, and wot he don't know about the stage 'business' ain't worth knowin'. He knows the whole bag of tricks, believe me! Now I don't care how clever an author is, there's always somethin' to learn, ain't there? Specially from a man which has been an actor all his life. See wot I mean? I know you ain't got a swelled head like most of these cheap skates of vodveel writers; you got common sense enough to see the help this feller can be to you. See wot I mean? You know I'm here to look after your int'rests, and see that you get all the traffic will stand—get all you can, you know; so if you are willin' to have those few little changes made which will help to make your stuff go, why . . . I'd be willin' to bet it's as good as sold!"

All of which sounded like so much celestial music to

Cogan's ears. He knew only too well the discouraging, uphill fight of the budding playwright! He had tried to sell the play himself, only to find that although managers asserted—in newspaper interviews written by their own press agents—that they were hunting for new plays, and would welcome a new dramatist—more especially a native American—with open arms, glad of the opportunity of helping native talent, the bitter and unpalatable truth was quite the opposite; for they, apparently, unearthed all the objections they could find against his play.

After listening to the depressing verdict—accompanied by criticism—of one manager, he would try the next on his list of theatrical producers, wait what seemed an interminable time for a decision, then have his MS rejected (in a dilapidated condition, which meant expense re-typing it) with a new batch of objections.

One manager said it dealt with a phase of life that had been in a play three years ago; consequently, he could not consider it. He was looking for something new; something that had never been done! Another said it had too much talk and not enough action; yet another asserted that it did not have enough sparkling lines; a third thought it wasn't seasonable. One objection was: the lead was a male part when—in the opinion of the objector—it should have been written for a woman; there would be more chance for the advertising man to get "write-ups" in the newspapers. "Anyway, nobody gives a damn for male characters nowadays!"—so the manager affirmed. "This is the era of the pretty girl. If she has

'bedroom' eyes and can swing her hips in a suggestive way—you know" (with a slimy wink) "people will fall all over themselves buying tickets to see her. The men will go to get a new sensation, and the women to get new pointers. They'll cough up all kinds of money to see her! She may have no more voice than a squirt, and know no more of acting than old Joe the chimpanzee in Bronx Park; so long as she's got a good figure and doesn't mind showing it, why . . ."

Which was most depressing to an author with a clean mind and high artistic ideals.

One opined that it might pass muster, if the first two acts were re-written by another dramatist (a friend of the speaker's!); others thought the third act was the one which should be changed. The play called for too much expense in the mounting; the play did not give opportunity enough for pretty scenery;—so ran some of the opinions. And so on, and so on, *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam!*

One of the managers said Cogan was too late, as he himself—strangely enough—had written a play in which he used practically the same idea; and worked out—strange to say—along almost parallel lines!

"If I wasn't certain that nobody but myself had seen my manuscript, I would have sworn someone had told you all about it; yours is so much like mine." So he said!

Cogan was blissfully ignorant that that was this particular producer's method of "writing" plays. He was a genius at picking out "situations" and clever

lines from plays submitted to him, and rehashing the stolen lines and dialogue into the form of an "original" play. After a year's tramping from one manager to another, Cogan was so discouraged that he began to think his faith in the play as a laugh-producer was misplaced, and felt inclined to either burn it as rubbish or throw it into a drawer and forget all his aspirations along the lines of dramatic writing. Feeling blue and despondent one day, he unbosomed himself on the subject to Tracy, the short-story writer, who, in turn, mentioned the matter to me; for he was aware that I had—as a change from painting posters—written and sold some scenarios for motion pictures. Tracy thought it was possible I might be able to help Cogan—if only to advise him.

Having made some theatrical posters for Solly Marks, whom I had found very much more honest and straightforward in his business dealings than the average run of theatrical people (which was not saying much, for most of them, given the chance, would not only steal their fellow-actor's "business" or "acts," but also the Throne of Grace itself if it wasn't spiked down), I suggested to Tracy that Solly, knowing the inside of the game, would be better able to market the play than Cogan. Having had dealings with theatrical folk, I knew a trifle more of their characteristics than Cogan did; so I was only too glad to be of service to him.

Theatrical people as individuals and in their private lives, are no worse than the average human; rather better, if anything. But, in their professional characteristics, they fall below the average ethical

standard. On their better side, they are generous to a fault; big-hearted, noble men and women. The other—their professional—side is full of failings. Honor, truthfulness, and justice seem to be almost unknown to them! At one time they will be all generosity to their fellow-mummer, helping him to their utmost; the next minute, professionally, they will damn him with faint praise, if not something worse. They will help him to get a job; then, on the stage, steal his spotlight! A folk full of inconsistencies of admirable qualities; but also of petty, mean traits. A lot of splendid, genial, generous, lying, thieving, irresponsible contract-breaking scamps! I know whereof I speak.

I did not need to be told what a small chance big-hearted, easily discouraged, volatile Cogan would stand with the theatrical crowd! A true son of that race which is a combination of hotheaded fighting ability, blarney and gullibility—the Irish, Cogan was lucky in not having his play stolen and produced under another name. (Strange that the people who are so expert with the "blarney" and "comether" should be so trusting and simple. But so it is).

Cogan responded so enthusiastically to the alluring talk that Marks handed out to him, he was willing to make almost any concessions. Indeed, if Marks had sung his siren song in that wheezy lullaby of his for five minutes more, the editor in all probability would have made Benton a present of the play; he was so elated at the prospect of it being put into immediate rehearsal, with the further probability of a performance in the near future. He, like the true

artist he was, thought more of seeing his brain-child presented to the public, than of the immediate monetary returns.

When the actor arrived, and added his suave accents to those of wheezy Marks, the matter of the sale of the play (without royalties!) was soon concluded. Then the changes and additions, mostly in the leading part, were proposed with such cogent arguments that Cogan readily fell in with Benton's wishes. Cogan was so delighted with the praises of the comedy that he threw his arm around the actor's shoulders, saying:

"Say, brother; I am glad to meet you! You are like the Good Samaritan pouring oil on my wounded soul, and binding up the bruises where those damned managers have 'biffed' me! Whatever changes you want I'll make them—gladly."

The actor's face lighted up with a hypocritical smile.

Then the question of where the collaboration could be done was discussed.

"The quicker we get to work," urged Benton, "and finish the script, the sooner we can put it in rehearsal. Can you manage to come and do the work in my hotel after your office hours? I have a fairly comfortable room, and if we need a drink now and then . . ."

Cogan, with his usual big-hearted generosity, had a much better suggestion to offer. "Since you are so anxious to get to work on it, why not be my guest at my house for the few evenings? The country air will do you good; I can promise you some good home

cooking, and you can be one of the family. I am sure my wife will be glad to make your acquaintance. What do you say?" He pulled out his watch, waiting for the answer.

The actor pretended to hesitate. Not because he was averse to the proposition, for it fitted in only too well with his views of life; he could amuse himself with the wife while the husband was occupied elsewhere. His hesitation was merely a bit of stagecraft. He knew the value of the "pause."

"If you say 'yes,'" said Cogan, his watch in his hand, "I will phone to the wife; then we can catch the train in comfortable time and without hurrying ourselves."

After a few moments of frowning deliberation, the actor glanced down at his expensive suit of clothes, and with an apologetic wave of his jewelled fingers, said: "If you think I am fit to meet your good lady . . . er . . . dressed like this. . . ."

"Oh, I guess so," laughed the editor. "She welcomes me in this old hand-me-down suit, so your glad rags ought to pass muster."

"Very well, I accept with pleasure," purred Benton, smiling.

Cogan took up the phone at his elbow, and called the number of his house. Maggie the servant answered the call with the information that her mistress was upstairs. "Shall I call her, sir?"

"No, don't bother her, Maggie," replied Cogan. "Just tell her that I am bringing a friend to dine with us this evening."

Earlier in the afternoon, Jack Waller had gone to the city to call on some of his intimates, promising to be back if possible in time for dinner; which, however, was not to be delayed on his account. Mrs. Cogan and Harold had accompanied him to the railroad station, and his sister had laughingly replied (when he asked her not to wait dinner for him), "Indeed I shall not, boysie. It will be the milk train you'll come home on!"

On the way to the station, they had met almost all the feminine part of the population of the little town (at least, that was Jack's surmise); which gave his sister the opportunity and very great pleasure—to herself—of introducing her hero brother to them. After seeing the train pull out, she had the time of her life on the way home, telling those of her female friends whom Jack had not happened to meet; filling their souls with envy and regret for having missed him.

Arriving home with Harold, both hot and dusty, she had changed her walking dress for one of a shimmering, green fabric which Cogan liked because it fitted her voluptuous figure to perfection; its color making a splendid foil for her wavy, dark red hair with its golden lights and luminous copper-colored shadows.

"That's just like Tom Cogan," she told her reflection in the mirror; "phoning at the last minute! It's lucky I told Maggie to cook a big dinner; so even if Jack does get back in time, the poor boy'll have something to eat, anyhow . . . God bless him!" she

added, remembering with delight the favorable impression he had made on her women friends.

"I wonder if he is heart-whole," she mused, as she went down the stairs to attend to her household duties.

The subject of her thoughts was enjoying himself in the company of some of his old college chums who had forgathered in an uptown club to give him a rousing welcome, with an extra "rah! rah! rah" for good measure. About the same time, Cogan and Benton were journeying to the editor's residence, pushed on by the hand of a relentless Fate to a denouement they neither expected nor—if they had forseen the outcome—would have desired.

XI.

Mrs. Cogan was softly crooning an old Irish melody as she arranged the flowers in the large epergne on the table. She had put a slender cut-glass flower-holder with a rose from the garden near her husband's place—as she always did when anything special was afoot.

"God bless his big heart! If he has good news, he will like to see the rose; and if it is bad news—which God forbid—why, the flower will cheer him up," she reasoned in her Irish fashion.

At the other end of the table, Harold was gravely imitating her actions—setting the table. He had arranged his toys in the usual semi-circle in front of his place, and noticing the rose set for his father, demanded some flowers to put in front of *his* hero—the toy French soldier.

"Mumthee, me want thum fowthies for 'poo-poo,'" he lisped.

"You do, eh?" his mother replied. "And for 'piou-piou' no less. Well, mumsie's darling shall have fowthies. Yes indeed; I just guess yes!"

She smiled happily as she took a couple of large daisies out of the epergne, and stuck them between the buttons of the toy "piou-piou." At that mo-

ment she heard the front door open and close; then heard her husband's hearty laugh.

"Thanks be!" she exclaimed under her breath. "It's good news!"

She passed between the half-open doors into the parlor as her husband entered it. He threw his arms around her shoulders, and, as he kissed her, whispered: "Good news, Kitty!"

"This is my wife, Mr. Benton," he said to the actor standing inside the parlor door in the half-light—for Mrs. Cogan in her haste to greet her husband had forgotten to push the electric light button.

"I am very glad indeed to meet you" said Mrs. Cogan—she didn't catch the name, extending her hand in welcome.

The actor stepped into the glare of the light coming from the dining room. Mrs. Cogan hesitated doubtfully when she saw his face, then quickly withdrew her hand.

"I guess we can have a little more light on the subject," suggested Cogan, pushing the electric switch, and flooding the parlor with light.

His wife and Benton were standing beneath the central cluster of electric bulbs; with the full glare lighting up their faces. The smile of welcome froze on Mrs. Cogan's face, and turned to a stony look of fear and repulsion as Benton suddenly recognized her.

"I am indeed glad to meet you . . . again!" he purred with a mocking smile of gratification.

For a moment, she closed her eyes . . . she felt deathly faint; then, by an effort of will power, she

turned, and went out into the hall. Fortunately, Harold had rushed into the room and into his father's arms, so Cogan did not notice anything unusual; he was too much occupied returning his boy's caresses. The child was introduced to Benton who was amused at his prattle about his toys.

"He has a great collection of toys, this boy has," Cogan informed the actor. "Just look at that lay-out!" He pushed the doors open, and waved his hand toward the table.

"Shouldn't be lonely with all that lot," was the actor's comment. He glanced round the room, 'Quite a cozy little nest for the dear girl'—he thought, meaning Mrs. Cogan, 'suits me to a T!'

Mrs. Cogan standing out in the hall, feeling numb and sick with a nameless dread, wondered what she should do. That this man, of all men, should have come into her home; her little Paradise! What had she better do? His coming, sudden and unexpected, tore away the curtain of forgetfulness, and disclosed a hideous memory that brought back recollections which filled her with apprehension and dismay. *What should she do?* What *could* she do? "'Good news, Kitty,'" she muttered bitterly, recalling her husband's whisper. "The devil be thanked for such news!"

The past, with its follies and heart-burnings had, for the last six or seven years, been but a hateful memory of happenings she had steadfastly striven to forget, and bury in oblivion. When she married Cogan, she believed that happiness was within her reach; she had only to take to have. Then, when her child came to fill her cup of happiness to the brim,

she had blotted out the past so effectually that it seemed but a hazy dream. And now! Here was this viper, this devil in human shape, the cause of the only misery she had ever known, welcomed to her home, her Eden, and by her own unsuspecting husband!

As the blood surged through her temples, she felt an insane desire to laugh aloud at the grim humor of the situation. "'Good news, Kitty'"—she hissed between her teeth; her eyes glinting with a reddish gleam. "What shall I do?" She felt like shrieking the words. "Go in and face him? Tell Tom everything, and have done with it? Finish it, and get it over, once and for all; or . . . brazen it out with the beast? Wait for him to give the cue and play my part accordingly?" She mumbled the questions behind her clinched teeth.

She stood . . . undecided. . . .

She heard him interrogate her boy regarding his toys, and the sound of his crisply enunciated phrases cut into her vitals with a throbbing pain; filling her with loathing and hatred.

Though she felt weak and unable to even think clearly, she knew that she could not stay out there all the evening; that was certain. "Then what shall I do?" she wailed inwardly. "What *shall* I do?" Her immediate problem was solved for her by the servant coming from the kitchen into the hall and saying:

"Everything is ready, mum."

"All right, Maggie," she replied in a voice which seemed to belong to some other person.

The servant's announcement roused her from her

stupor, and made her understand the necessity of deciding on the course she would follow. Her eyes flashed as she straightened herself, goaded into action.

"I may as well face the music, whatever the tune," she muttered, with a grim set of her lips.

She re-entered the parlor, and passed into the dining room.

"Dinner is ready, Tom," she said calmly. She pointed to where the actor was to sit. "Your guest can take that chair." Pausing in the doorway a moment, she said to Benton in a cold voice, "Excuse me," then passed out and into the kitchen.

Putting his young hopeful in his high chair, Cogan waved his hand to Benton's place. "Sit down there, brother, and make yourself 'to hum;' and"—he proceeded to seat himself—"if you don't see what you want, let us know and we will try to get it for you. All we ask of our guests is: to accept the little we have to offer, and to make themselves thoroughly at home. Quite as if they were in their own home." He smiled genially, having finished what was the usual preliminary with a new visitor.

The servant came in with the tureen of soup, which she placed in front of Cogan.

"Careful, careful!" he exclaimed, making room for the dish, "Be careful of my rose, Maggie! It would mean a year's ill luck, you know, to knock that over." He was in high spirits and full of good humor.

"I see there is one here, too," remarked the actor. "Is it for me?"

"Sure thing! That's for you. My wife always

welcomes our guests with roses. Roses in her estimation are the most beautiful flowers on earth, so . . . well, you can draw your own inference." He beamed with delight.

"An exceedingly charming custom; and very sweet and lovely of her," purred Benton. "Isn't the lovely lady going to join us?" he asked, seeing Cogan commencing to eat.

"My wife makes the best soup I ever tasted anywhere; but she never eats it. Why, I could never understand; for she always takes soup when we dine out. And I guess we won't see much of her at the table,"—he lowered his voice so that Maggie, going out of the room, should not hear the remark; "she likes to give her whole attention to the kitchen when we have visitors. You know how fussy the women are."

"That is too bad! I'd like to talk over old times with her."

Cogan turned an inquiring glance on the actor.

"I had the pleasure of meeting her years ago—when she was studying dramatic art."

"Is that so?" said Cogan, very much pleased. "Well, I'm glad to hear that! It will help to make you feel at home. That's fine!"

Mrs. Cogan was about to enter the dining room when she heard the actor's remark. She reeled as though struck by a blow! Gasping with terror, she leaned against the wall with her hands pressed on her heaving bosom.

"Mrs. Cogan—or Miss Carroll when I met her—was a very promising actress; or rather . . . uh . . .

student, perhaps I should say. . . . Did she follow it up? Go into the profession?"

"I don't know. . . . I don't think so. . . . At least, I have never heard her say anything of having been on the stage," replied Cogan, busy with his food.

She heard the smooth accents of Benton asking the question, and her gorge arose within her. A grim, tense look came into her face. "Promising actress, was I?" she muttered under her breath. "You devil! Then I'll show you some acting tonight, you snake!"

Her whole body turned cold. If she *had* to fight for her home, husband and child, she *would* fight, and fight like a tigress! She wasn't going to allow him to spoil her life without a struggle. Why should he come into her life now, after what had happened? She wouldn't stand for it; that was all. And that was enough for her! She would fight him, fight him; fight him and his deviltry to the last ditch! . . . She would have to try to conceal her repugnance, otherwise her husband might notice there was something wrong; and while she dreaded meeting his eyes, and sitting at the same table with him, she was between the devil and the deep sea. . . . God only knew what he *would* say! . . . How far he would go. . . . So it was best that she were there to hear what he *did* say, and so know the worst, rather than remain in ignorance and torture.

Bracing herself for the coming ordeal, her face set and pale, her heart beating wildly, she went into the dining room, and seated herself in her place

at the table. Her appearance was hailed with delight by the actor.

"Ha! Here is the sweet lady! I was afraid we were not to have the pleasure of your company," he purred with an ingratiating smile.

She paid no heed to the remark, and leaned over to attend to the boy.

"Please allow me to compliment you on the dinner. It is excellent! I have not tasted better anywhere. . . . My friend Cogan"—he stressed the word 'friend'—"is to be congratulated on having such a wife; a true helpmeet. One who can look after not only the inner man, but also help him in his work." He bowed gallantly.

She wondered what was coming.

"I was only a moment ago saying to your clever husband what a great help your dramatic talent must be to him in his play-writing."

"That so?" she said in an icy tone. "I think Mr. Cogan does not need any of the very slight knowledge I may have gained along that line. He has forgotten more than I ever learned. Anyway, so far as I am concerned, those days are past, and I have no desire to go back to them; even in memory." She stared defiantly at him, her eyes telling him as plainly as words: "You know what I mean!"

The actor half closed his eyes, and, giving a quick side glance at Cogan, leered at her with an insolent smile.

A rapid eater, Cogan was so occupied with his dinner—which he was in a hurry to finish so as to get to work—he did not notice the by-play; but hearing

the word "playwriting," it reminded him of his own play, and the reason for Benton's presence.

"Oh yes, Kitty!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I forgot that I had not told you. Mr. Benton has bought my comedy—*A Fool and His Folly,* conditional on my making some changes, and in which I shall have the benefit of his experience. So, you see, we shall have the pleasure of his company for a few evenings."

Her heart sank at the news! She looked at her husband in amazement, then at the actor, who smiled sardonically as he gave a slight bow of affirmation.

"Do you mean . . . here?" she faltered.

"Sure!" replied the husband, full of his subject. "It'll be very pleasant all round. You can talk about old times, and Jack can. . . ." He snapped his fingers in a gesture of disgust. "Tut! I've got the dickens of a memory! Maggie said that Jack had gone up to town." He turned to the actor. "You'll be glad to meet my brother-in-law. I completely forgot to tell you of him! You did not know we had a hero in the family, did you?" He whipped out the sentences regardless of their continuity. "Well, we have! A bloomin' 'ero!"

It was the actor's turn to be surprised. 'Hero,' 'brother-in-law?' ran quickly through his brain. He had a vague apprehension and suspicion . . . that . . . "A hero, did you say? . . . uh . . . Your brother-in-law?" he mumbled.

Cogan nodded gaily. "Yep! He came in from France, yesterday, on the *République.* Jack Waller, my wife's brother."

"Waller? Your wife's brother?" repeated the actor, his face going pale, wondering if some kind of trap had been set for him.

"Well, to be precise, my wife's half-brother."

Benton wiped his dry lips with his napkin to hide any tell-tale emotion, while he absorbed the disturbing news, and recovered his poise. His half closed eyes blazed with a baneful light as he mentally conjectured the possibilities of another meeting with Jack. He wished for nothing better than to meet his assailant; but in his own good time, and on his own ground where he could have the whiphand; where everything had been arranged and schemed out for his own advantage. But here, in this house, where everything was against him, was quite another matter. He cudgelled his brain for an excuse to get out of the place as soon and as gracefully as possible, and without arousing Cogans suspicions. He fumbled nervously with his dessert spoon, biting his thin lips in his anger at Cogan for forgetting to tell him, and before he had acecpted the invitation to dinner.

"What time did Jack say he would be home, Kitty?" her husband asked.

Benton waited breathlessly for the answer.

"I don't expect him until late this evening."

Benton gave a sigh of relief. 'Oh, well, in that case, and as the evening is young,' he thought, 'I can stay for a half-hour or so, and then make my exit. . . . I'll find some excuse by that time.'

Inwardly he cursed Cogan for a big, blundering fool, and vowed to make him sweat for getting him into such a hole; and, looking at Mrs. Cogan over

the edge of his glass as he sipped his wine, he mentally cursed her and the child she was speaking to in a fondling tone. The boy gazed at him with round eyes, feeling the hate that came from the visitor at the other end of the table.

Suddenly, a light broke in on Benton! He drew a sharp breath, and closed his eyes. His face was set and impassive; but inwardly he shook with joyous laughter. Was there ever such luck! 'And here was I going to throw my chance away!' He could hardly keep from laughing out loud, as this new possibility loomed up in his mind. 'So Mister Jack Waller . . . hero . . . is *her* brother,' he thought. 'Two birds with one stone! The damned insolent pup, and his dearly beloved sister.' He smiled grimly, thinking of the revenge that lay within his reach. Carelessly laying his open hand on the table, palm upward, he slowly closed his fingers until the points of his well-manicured nails sank into his fat flesh—to illustrate the thought running through his mind. He enjoyed the self-inflicted pain; for, as he assured himself, it gave him a little taste of the agonies he intended should be their portion. He had them in the hollow of his hand, and had only to close his fingers to crush them both.

Talk of plays! Of comedies! This would be the most rollicking comedy he had ever played in; *he* would see to that! A tragic-comedy with the comedian as hero; with all the "fat" of the piece, and a corking "tag" at the end. A masterpiece!

"I shall indeed be most delighted to meet him!"

Benton exclaimed enthusiastically; his eyes gleaming with an evil light.

"You will like him, all right," said Cogan decisively; "he is a splendid fellow."

"I can quite believe it—if he is Mrs. Cogan's brother." He smiled unctuously at Mrs. Cogan. "You must be proud to have a brother who is a hero."

"I *am* proud of my brother. He is a man worth knowing and . . . imitating." Her lip curled, and she looked at him with a significant stare.

The actor bowed hypocritically, a sardonic smile playing on his thin lips. 'He is a *man*, is he?'—his thoughts ran. 'You shall see me make a monkey of him before I get through with him!' He could barely restrain himself from spitting out the words at her.

"Well, now, that's done!" Cogan broke in, throwing his napkin on the table. "If you are ready to go to work, I am at your service." He heaved a sigh of repletion.

Benton bowed assent. "If the good lady of the house will kindly excuse us."

The men rose from the table, Cogan leading the way to his study,—his "den" as he called it. As Benton, slowly following his host, passed near Mrs. Cogan's chair, he bowed and paused for an instant; long enough to say: "We never know what good fortune the Fates have in store for us, do we?" He chuckled insolently.

She winced at the words and drew away from him, shuddering with antipathy. He passed out of the room, adjusting his monocle as he went, leaving her staring blankly in front of her, endeavoring to fathom

the depths of misery she had to sound as a result of this man's hateful presence in her home.

All through the meal, the boy had been unaccountably quiet. Generally, he monopolized the attention of the visitors his father was so fond of bringing home; but this evening he had been unusually silent.

There is an old saying to the effect that if a child or a dog is friendly to a man, that man cannot be, at bottom, very bad. It may be that Harold's intuition informed him that Benton was in some way inimical to the happiness of his home, for he had quickly drawn himself into his shell, and contented himself with looking at the actor with wide-open eyes. Wise men tell us that very young children are clairvoyant; that they are in touch with that spirit-land from which they have recently come into ours; that they—like the dog, cat, and other animals—see things belonging to the world over the border, and beyond our material senses.

Harold's round-eyed gaze followed Benton as he went out of the room. When the actor had gone, he turned to his mother and whispered:

"Mumsie!" His mother looked absentmindedly at him. "Doth 'oo like dat man?"

The child's question awakened her to the stern reality of what Benton's presence meant to her. She sprang from her chair, and clasped the boy to her bosom.

"Me don't like 'im," piped the child, in a voice muffled by the pressure of her embracing arms.

Her lips set in a straight line, and a look of intense hatred came over her face. Maggie, the ser-

vant, came in with a tray, prepared to clear the table. She hesitated when she saw Mrs. Cogan's attitude and expression. She sensed the fact that something was amiss, and, with the intuition of her sex, felt that the visitor was in some way the cause.

"Shall I clear the things away, ma'am?" she asked.

The question aroused her mistress out of her cogitation; and unclasping her arms from around her boy, she slid back on to her chair.

"Yes," she said wearily, "you can clear the table, Maggie;" then turned to help Harold off his chair in response to his demand, so that he could, as usual, help Maggie by carrying the knives, forks, spoons, and other small articles into the kitchen.

In utter weariness of spirit, her face buried in her hand, she sat back in her chair and gave herself to the thoughts that raced through her mind. So absorbed was she in bitter remembrances and reflections, she did not hear her brother come in, until he stood beside her and asked:

"What's the matter, sis; got a headache?"

Looking up, startled at the sound of his voice, she discovered that tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Why, Kitty, old girl! What's the trouble?"

Harold hearing his uncle's voice, rushed in and tried to climb into his arms. The interruption gave Mrs. Cogan an opportunity to wipe her eyes, and ask her brother if he had had his dinner. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, she said to Harold.

"Dearie, go and tell Maggie that Uncle Jack has had his dinner,—there's a good boy."

When the child had run off with the message, Jack

with a look of concern inquired, "What is it, Kitty? Can I help you?"

She gulped: "Tom has brought a visitor, a man I hate. And he expects to come here every evening for a couple of weeks."

Jack looked perplexed, then suggested, "Well why not tell Tom you don't want the fellow here?"

"Tom has sold his play to him on the condition that he makes some changes, which this . . . this fellow will help him to do."

Further conversation was stopped by the reappearance of Harold, who, having got his job in the kitchen finished, now wanted his uncle to play "soldiers" with him.

Benton's recipe for "success" was: "One thing at a time—and do it brown!"

Now that he was in Tom Cogan's den with the play in his hand, he dismissed everything else from his mind. There would be plenty of time to attend to Mrs. Cogan and her hero brother. He would attend to them when the time arrived; and pick the fruit when it was good and ripe! Everything came to him who waited, and—as he often jocularly remarked—he was a good waiter. Now, the play was the thing! He wanted it whipped into proper shape as quickly as possible so that he could make some money—that was business. The other affair would

be a matter of pleasure—very great pleasure, he smilingly assured himself.

Cogan also was anxious to get to work; for he wanted his "brain-child" put in trim for public presentation. He heard his "good fortune"—which meant money and fame—knocking at his door, and he was eager to open wide the gates and let the elusive lady enter. He and the actor had started work on the opening scene in the play when the sound of Jack's voice come from the dining room. He pricked up his ears, listening.

"Excuse me a moment," interrupting Benton's reading. "I hear my brother-in-law's voice. I want you to meet him." He threw open the door of his study and called: "Jack! Ho, Jack! Here a minute, will you?"

Mrs. Cogan, her head throbbing with a dull pain, heard her husband's call. "Tom wants to introduce you, Jack."

Her brother frowned. "I don't want to meet anyone you dislike."

"Yes, go, Jack; otherwise Tom'll bring him in here —and I don't want that," she pleaded.

"All right, old girl; I'll go." Telling Harold to wait until he returned, Jack went slowly toward the den. Cogan was at the door waiting for him.

With his instinct for dramatic situations, the actor was sitting with his back to the door, pretending to be engrossed in the manuscript of the play. When he heard Jack enter, and heard Cogan's voice boom out heartily, "This is my brother-in-law, Jack Waller," Benton stood up, and turned to face him.

"I am very glad indeed to meet you again, Mr. Waller," he said in a velvety tone; "and, I hope, under more propitious conditions for a better acquaintance."

During the few moments it had taken Waller to come from the dining room, he had wondered what type of man this was whom his sister hated, and to whom he was to be introduced. Even in his most extravagant flight of fancy, Benton would have been the last man he would have thought of; and now, here was the lump of corruption standing before him, a hypocritical smile on his thin lips, offering him his unclean paw—for the second time! The scene on shipboard—when he had refused to shake hands with this reprobate—flashed across his memory. He had been prepared to say a few commonplaces, and then excuse himself. Now his teeth came together so tightly, the muscles of his jaws stood out in hard lumps; the pupils of his eyes contracted into a stony glare of contempt; his nostrils quivered ominously. He had to call on all his reserve will-power to keep his fist from smashing the dissipated face and blotting out for ever the oily, hypocritical smile. The surprise was so sudden, and so unexpected, that it almost carried him off his feet. He gave a curt nod to Cogan, turned on his heel, and strode out of the room—raging with anger.

Cogan stood, openmouthed, staring at the door Jack had closed behind him. Bewildered, he turned dully to the actor who was trying to look unconcerned.

"Why . . . Benton . . ." he stammered, "whatever is the meaning of this?"

"I am to blame. If I had dreamed that he was going to act this way, I would have told you of my having met him."

"You know Jack? You . . . met him?" Cogan asked, astounded.

"We . . uh . . came over on the same boat . . fellow passengers; and . . on the night . . before we landed . . . I . . . . had a little too much wine . . . and said something . . . he resented. Of course . . . I was sorry and . . uh . . apologized the next morning, but . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well! I am astonished that Jack takes it so much to heart as all that!" replied Cogan, frowning.

"Naturally, I thought my offering to apologize like a gentleman . . ." the actor purred softly.

"Oh! that'll never do. Jack isn't the sort of chap to bear emnity. He must be mistaken. Just wait—I'll fix it!" He walked quickly out of the study.

Jack had re-entered the dining room, and his sister, catching sight of his stern face, now white with anger, was about to ask him what had happened when Cogan bounced in.

"Jack! old fellow! I didn't think you could hold such resentment!" he protested.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Tom; but if you had heard what that man said the other night, you wouldn't harbor him in your house for one minute. He is poisonous!"

"Jack! old chap! I am surprised! You should be able to forgive things said under the influence of drink."

"There are some things I can't and will not forgive."

"But, old fellow, a man isn't altogether responsible when . . he's drunk."

"That rotter wasn't drunk enough not to know what he was doing and saying; but drunk enough to show his true nature."

"Oh, come along! Forget it this once, and accept his apology—if only to please me."

"I would like to please you, Tom, but that is out of the question. I'd as soon put a bullet in his dirty hide as bandy words with him!"

The actor, standing at the door of the den, listened to the colloquy between Cogan and Jack; his face distorted with passion and malevolence. "Ha! you would, would you, mister hero!" he hissed between his teeth. "Put a bullet in me, eh? The time will come when you'll be glad to go on your knees to me, you pup! For your own sake, and for the sake of your loving sister." His face darkened with intense hate as he tip-toed back to the desk in time to avoid being seen by Cogan, who returned feeling thoroughly disappointed at his failure with Jack.

"I am awfully sorry . . ." he began, lamely.

"What's that?" inquired the actor, looking up from the manuscript he pretended to be absorbed in.

"My brother-in-law's feelings appear to have been hurt, somehow, and . . . I cannot get him to see it the way I do," explained Cogan, regretfully.

"Hmph!" grunted Benton. "I did my best to apologize for my remarks. A man of honor cannot

do more; so . . ." with a gesture to indicate that he was helpless in the matter.

"I am very sorry," Cogan repeated. "I looked forward to you being one of the family circle, and . . . ."

"I am sorry, too, but . . . it is done, and . . ." he smiled suavely. "Suppose we get to work," he suggested briskly. " 'Time and tide' you know . . . ."

Although Cogan tried his level best to devote his mind to the alterations suggested by the actor, his efforts to enter into the spirit of the comedy were not very successful. Benton seeing that he was in no humor to do creative work, offered to read the play aloud, and point out where, in his opinion, the changes and additions would be necessary; then Cogan, when he felt like it, could write the lines and "business." Cogan acquiesced in this arrangement, and, for the next hour or so, listened to the actor's well-modulated voice speaking the witty lines of the comedy, while he jotted down the suggestions the actor interspersed here and there.

"I think we have made a good start," ventured Benton when he had finished. "What do you think of my ideas? Do they meet with your approval?"

"Yes, indeed!" responded Cogan. "I'm sure they will improve it very materially."

"Then you have no objections to them."

"No indeed. On the contrary, I feel that I am under a great obligation to you for the help. I didn't think it could be improved so much. I am thankful to have the benefit of your practical stage experience."

The actor swelled up under the praise. "Then I think we can work harmoniously together, and give the lie to that old gag of the author and actor not being able to agree. What do you think?"

Cogan laughed at the sally. "'Harmonious' expresses it, brother!" A look of regret came into his face. "I am sorry though, awfully sorry that your first visit here should in a measure be spoiled by . . . uh . . ."

"Please don't mention it, Cogan!" the actor replied with a distressed expression. "I have had a very pleasant visit, indeed. As for the little . . . cloud, shall I call it? I am to blame for that. I should not have indulged to such an extent; but . . . . you know. . . . I'm not a saint—just a normal man, and I was so elated at the prospect of seeing God's country once again—after being away for five years, wandering in strange lands, that . . . I drank too much, and said things I probably would not have said if I had been sober."

It has been already remarked that the Irish are the most easily bamboozled race on earth. When it comes to sizing up the duplicity of their fellow-humans they are as green as the grass of their own Emerald Isle. And Cogan was no exception to the rule.

"Put it there, brother!" he exclaimed, extending his hand in a hearty fashion; "I understand your feelings exactly! I am a big, rough kind of hoodlum when I get my Irish up, and say things for which I am sorry afterwards; and while I am not a drinking man to any extent, I have had enough experience with men

to know that one in his cups will often say things he'd rather have left unsaid."

He threw his arm around the actor's shoulder in that blustery, generous way of his, while Benton smiled with half closed eyes.

"While you are putting your coat on, I'll tell the missus you are going." He went into the dining room where the only occupant was Jack—smoking and reading the evening newspaper.

"Where is Kitty, Jack?" he asked.

"Upstairs, I think, Tom; putting the kiddie to bed."

Cogan returned to Benton who was putting on his gloves.

"The wife is putting the youngster to bed; but if you don't mind waiting, why. . . ."

"My dear fellow. I have upset your household arrangements quite enough for one evening; so please don't disturb her. Perhaps I shall have the pleasure some other time." He looked inquiringly at Cogan.

"Yes, certainly! Tomorrow evening."

Benton bowed, smiling with satisfaction.

While Cogan accompanied the actor to the garden gate, his wife came downstairs and joined her brother in the dining room.

"Tom was here a moment ago, looking for you," Jack informed her, glancing up from his newspaper.

"I expected he would; that was why I didn't come down sooner. I didn't want to meet that man again. He has just gone."

"How did *you* come to know that scamp, Kitty?"

"I met him years ago, to my sorrow, when I was studying in a School of Acting. I'll tell you all about it, sometime," she added hurriedly, hearing her husband enter and close the front door.

"He is an infernal scamp!" burst out Jack as Cogan entered the room.

"Tom, have you signed any contract with that man?" asked his wife.

"Certainly I have, my dear. Why do you ask?

"Only that I wish you hadn't!"

"That's it! That's just like the women!" retorted Cogan, the blood mounting to his face. "Here, after trying to sell my play for over a year, I get a chance to have it produced; and now, because of what Jack has said, you take a sudden dislike to the man, and throw obstacles in my way."

"You know quite well I don't want to throw obstacles in your way, Tom; so don't say any such thing," replied his wife. "The good Lord knows I want you to succeed!"

"Then why the devil do you act this way? That's the curse of being married! A professional man should never get married. He should remain single, then he wouldn't have a fool woman's vagaries to contend with; for everything he tries to build up, she with her fatuous idiosyncracies pulls down." He was working himself into a passion.

His wife knew from experience that argument with Tom Cogan when he was in that mood was waste of energy and time, for it made him only more stubborn; she therefore fell back on the woman's natural, and most potent, weapon—tears.

"All right, Tom," she sobbed; "if he means more to you than your wife, go ahead!"

"Now what's the use of talking like that, Kitty? The man is kind enough to help me with my play, giving me the benefit of his practical experience to make its success more sure. I think you ought to feel glad, not to say grateful. Anyway, it is only for a few evenings."

"Well for those few evenings, you shall entertain him yourself; I'll have my dinner somewhere else," she retorted angrily.

"If that is all you are raising the rumpus about, he need not come here to dinner; and you need not meet him if you don't want to."

"That arrangement suits me," was her answer. "You can take him to your study, and then show him the door when you get through!" She flounced out of the room, and went upstairs.

Her husband sighed heavily as he threw himself into an easy chair, and bit the end off his cigar. "By gad! the women beat the Dutch!" He lit the cigar. "And blest if I can understand *your* attitude, Jack!" His brother-in-law took no notice of the remark. "A chap like you,"—puffing out large clouds of smoke, "that has seen so much of the world, and so much of men, to feel so badly over a few words said in. . . ."

"Do you refer to your visitor, Tom?" Jack interrupted.

"Yes . . . Benton!"

"Then I positively refuse to discuss him," replied Jack, with an air of finality. "Besides, I am going to bed; so, good night, old fellow."

Cogan's desire for conflict—even though it be only a wordy one—was frustrated by Jack's departure; so he had to content himself with puffing vigorously at his cigar.

The unlooked-for events of the evening had upset him; and though he admired his brother-in-law very much, yet he felt that he had not met the situation in a proper spirit. Being a poor reader of character, and thinking that everyone he met was as generous and big-hearted as himself, he was only too ready to take a new acquaintance at the man's own valuation; to accept him for what he advertised himself to be. He had been so favorably impressed by the actor's soft, bland suavity, he could not for a moment believe him to be as bad as Jack's remarks hinted.

'He is poisonous!' and 'I'd as soon put a bullet in his dirty hide' was what Jack had said. Which was, to say the least, very extravagant language; and Benton certainly did not deserve anything like that! He had, so far, in Cogan's presence, acted like a polished gentleman. How delicately he had tried to save Cogan any humiliation when Jack spurned his hand and turned on his heel to leave the room. Many men would have felt grossly insulted—and properly, too; and perhaps would have refused to do their share of the collaboration in the house where he had been treated so contemptuously. But no, Benton showed that he could rise above such personal insults; and, by Jove, it takes a very big man to do that!

No, there was no doubt in Cogan's mind but that

Benton certainly had the better of the encounter; he certainly shone by comparison with Jack.

And then, the outspoken manly way in which he admitted his fault, and explained why he had imbibed more than he should have. "He was glad to see God's own country, again!" So would any man be glad after tramping all over the world for five long years; and he would have a darned good excuse for drinking an extra glass or two of wine. There was no fault to be found with Benton on that score,—thought Cogan. And the stories he had told . . . well . . . what about it? What did they amount to after all? When a bunch of men who had nothing particular to do or think about got together, why . . . they usually started telling yarns, some of which might be comparatively innocent, but usually . . . the bulk of them were such that they would be somewhat out of place in a Sunday School, or in a Mothers' Meeting; although, by the same token, he had heard women—who had had a couple of glasses of wine too many—retail stories, and ask riddles which he, a man, would think twice before repeating!

Jack knew that quite as well as he did. And he, himself, in his college days—not so very long ago—had told a few hair-raisers that were not fit to print! He, too, had travelled around with a lot of society dames who were not above telling yarns that were a triffle off color; so why should he be so excessively thin-skinned as to take offience at Benton's yarns when there were no women present? Why should *he* set himself up as a Censor of Morals? A smoking-room on board ship wasn't a prayer meeting! If any-

one wanted to hear racy stories why . . . the smoking-room was the most likely place to find the tellers of such stories. Was Jack himself so good that he could afford to be censorious of other people's conduct? What had come over him, anyhow? He did not seem like the old devil-may-care Jack of his college days—up to all sorts of crazy pranks and devilment; known all along Broadway as one of the wildest young scamps unhung; and who had gone off with a laugh and a jest to join the other young daredevils of American adventurous spirits in the Foreign Legion in France.

"By jiminy, he certainly is changed!" he muttered, puffing his cigar. "What on earth has come over him, I wonder."

The events of the evening before, when Jack had told them of the visions he had seen, they, too, recurred to Cogan; and he remembered what a peculiar change of expression had come into Jack's face when he spoke of those experiences. As if they were heaven-sent visions! The crazy kid! Of course, such things were only to be expected when a man had a long, nerve-racking vigil to keep; and he had admitted they had occurred on his first night in the trenches. It was not to be wondered at that he should think he saw all sorts of things. "If I shut my eyes, I can see lots of things," mused Cogan, closing his eyes to give point to the remark. "Any fool can! I can see my desk all cluttered up; old Ted with his owl-like serious expression on his homely mug, as though he were a second Atlas with the world on his shoulders; I can see Brooklyn Bridge, the ferry boats, the . . .

oh, what's the use?" He laughed quietly to himself at the absurdity of the whole proceeding.

Laying his cigar-butt on the ash-tray, he shook his head doubtfully; trying to discover the reason for the difference between the old debonnair Jack and this new Jack. He gave up the problem as being beyond his powers of solution, but came to the conclusion that he was "peculiar, very peculiar," due probably—was his generous thought— to his nerve-racking experiences in the Aviation Corps.

XII.

In the Cogan house, that night, were two sleepless persons—Cogan and his wife.

They occupied separate, adjoining bedrooms. In Mrs. Cogan's, alongside her bed, was the crib in which Harold slept; for when Jack arrived, the boy had to give up his room to accommodate his uncle.

At the window gazing with unseeing eyes at the starry, moonlit night, Mrs. Cogan sat in her dressing gown, despondent, her mind filled with dismay because of this dark cloud coming between her and her happiness; a cloud which, every moment, grew larger and more portentous; looming up like a hideous spectre of the forgotten past, and throwing its dread shadow upon her home and all that was nearest and dearest to her.

She had been so happy in her married life, she often said that she was afraid it was too good to last. The honeymoon had been a period of unalloyed happiness; then her child was born. She watched him grow into the chubby, flaxen-haired boy, full of naive boyish ways, yet with a strange feminine streak of lovable demonstrativeness in his method of expressing his love for her; fond of taking her unawares, sometimes by tapping the window pane outside to at-

tract her attention and to tell her, "I love 'oo so much, mumsie!" accompanied by a winsome dimpled smile. At other times by creeping quietly behind her, and winding his little arms around her, to whisper in her ear the same momentous information—as though his love was a profound secret between themselves, which no other could share or understand; a deep mystery known only to them. And always with that strange other-world light beaming in his face; which would bring tears of exquisite joy into her eyes as she clasped him hungrily to her bosom, and told him in a voice palpitant with emotion that he wasn't merely a boy, but a veritable gift of God—an angel with an aureole of gold (his flaxen hair) who had come with all the love of the "other" children she desired, but . . . couldn't have. This one had come with all the love of the "others" embodied in his little self, and which they gave her through his caresses. So she told herself; while he, the child, looked at her with that other-world smile lighting up his face, as if he read her thought and seemed glad she understood.

She delighted to imagine that she saw the various personalities of the "other" children—which were denied her—in the varying moods of this one; and in the exuberance of her fancy (a secret she shared with no one), she had given names—boys' and girls' names—to fit the moods, and to indicate the different personalities, of her "mind-children" which were mirrored in this boy's constant changes of temperament.

She so overflowed with passionate mother-love, she took this method of "make-believe" to find relief from

the throbbing pain in her breasts which were designed for the mothering of numerous children. And now, here was this shadow like a menace coming in upon her and her child—her angel—her "other" children! What was the end to be? That was the question that appalled her; that gripped her heart-strings, drawing all the life-force out of her veins; that chilled her with a sickening anxiety; a question to which she could find no conclusive answer. The path ahead, full of forebodings, was dark and unfathomable; she could not even guess what the future held for her! The shadows were impenetrable, and she was as one alone in a wilderness.

This scheming devil—this Benton would, she felt convinced, stop at nothing! She knew him too well to think otherwise. Having wormed his way into her little Eden, he would go the limit. And he knew *how*, and *where* to strike! And then——*what?*

Her thoughts went over the same wearisome ground, in the hope that some ray of light would enter her soul to guide her and point the way out of the slough of despondency. With endless repetitions she went over the same considerations, the same arguments, the same hopeless yearnings; only to find herself travelling in a circle, and returning to where she had started from. Then, overwhelmed with fear, her tears would begin anew.

Absorbed in her problem, she was but dimly conscious that two prowling cats—meeting near the fence—were making night hideous with their caterwauling.

In the adjoining bedroom, his excited wakeful

brain working overtime, Cogan was tossing and twisting in a vain endeavor to get asleep. He tolerated the abominable noise as long as he could, hoping the animals would quit and leave him in peace; but suddenly, the night was rent by a blood-curdling yell that smote his overstrained nerves like a shock of ice-water, leaving him in a cold sweat. The tension of his high-strung nervous system broke; and, sickly faint, a pain like a sheet of flame scorching his brain, he threw off the bedclothes and staggered to his feet.

Turning on the electric light, and cursing all the cats in creation, he glanced around for something to throw at the offenders. Seizing the nearest and handiest thing—a heavy glass water-carafe on the table near the bed, he pushed open the window still wider, and hurled the carafe in the direction of the disturbers. It crashed with a loud bang against the fence, and scattered into small pieces. The cats deferred their vocal exhibition until some other and more propitious time.

The crash of the glass outside startled Mrs. Cogan nearly out of her wits! Hearing her husband's window being closed, she rushed to the door between the two bedrooms, and opening it exclaimed:

"Oh, Tom! What is the matter?"

It was fortunate for her that her husband had turned off the light, and could see her but dimly; otherwise, her tear-stained face might have given him cause to ask some questions on her own account; which, probably, she would have found some difficulty in answering. He merely yawned, and growled on his way back to his bed:

"Those confounded cats kept me awake with their infernal racket; so I threw the water-bottle at them. I'll be in the madhouse if I have much more of it—blast them!"

She closed the door behind her, softly, and leaned against the wall; pressing her bosom with her hand —trying to still her jumping heart.

XIII.

During the next two weeks, things went on much the same as usual. Benton came from New York on the same train every evening, making his appearance at the Cogans' house at about the same hour; and as the sliding doors between the dining room and parlor were closed when he arrived, he passed into the den with Cogan without seeing or coming in contact with the other members of the family. A couple of times Cogan was detained in his office, and on those occasions he dined in town, then caught the same train that brought Benton. The actor always caught the 11.15 to the city, so, taken altogether, the arrangement did not interfere very much with Mrs. Cogan's affairs, except that she had to entertain some of her visitors in the dining room instead of in the parlor.

Fortunately, her brother's advent in the colony was a god-send in many ways. He was invited to more luncheons and dinner than he could have eaten in six months; and naturally, being in a sense his sponsor, Mrs. Cogan (who always took Harold with her) was included in the invitations.

If Jack had been matrimonially inclined, he would have had little difficulty in finding more than one girl

willing to say 'yes' and to cast her lot in with his; for, to put it mildly, he was the most sought-after man of a marriageable age in all the town. As he disliked blowing his own trumpet and advertising his virtues, his sister saw to it that he did not suffer from his excess of modesty and lack of "push." It was due to her loving zeal that the colony learned that Jack had, on many occasions, helped to carry the colors of his Alma Mater to victory when playing on the gridiron against rival college teams; and that he had been tennis champion of his college for the three years prior to going to France.

A bit rusty at tennis now, owing—as he laughingly remarked—to the lack of facilities at the front for playing his favorite game, his hand and wrist soon regained their cunning, playing as he did every day on the courts of the Country Club. Sometimes a college chum or two came down from the city to take part in the tournaments the women members of the Club now, more than before, organized with a view to learning the fine points of the game; and as his arm no longer needed the splints and bandage, Jack was having the time of his life. He was making the most of it, too, for his vacation would soon be at an end and in a couple of weeks he would have to return to his duties "somewhere in France."

As day after day went by, without there being any sign of the disclosures she was afraid Benton would make to her husband, Mrs. Cogan's fear gradually subsided, and soon she was living her life as though the actor did not exist.

She was essentially an extremist. A true Irish-

woman! Today, if the sun was shining and everything going well, she was as happy and joyous as a lark; as buoyant as though there were no such things as dark days. She was optimism personified! Tomorrow, if the day was cloudy, it darkened her soul; if the sky was dreary and leaden-hued, her soul responded and she felt downcast and oppressed. A woman of moods. Up on the heights one moment; down in the depths the next!

In the few opportunities there had been for confidences, Jack had thrown out a hint or two regarding her previous acquaintance with Benton; but she had only responded with a frown and a sigh, and a promise to tell him "all about it—sometime." So long as there was no immediate danger, she was content to live her happy day while she could; for—as she argued with herself, with her feminine lack of reasoning—"he may not say anything after all, and if he does . . . well . . . I shall have to make the best of it, that's all!"

A man would have done differently. He, under similar conditions—knowing the possibilities of the danger—would have endeavored to forestall them, and would have prepared his defence in advance so as to meet the problems when they presented themselves. The average woman, being more or less a hypocrite (probably because she knows her physical disability, and has to fall back on insincerity to hide and gloss over her weakness), lulls herself into a false security, thinking that *because* the blow *has not fallen*, it probably never will. If her inner monitor asks the question: "Suppose the blow does fall; what then?" the

woman, not being able to reason from cause to effect, and from the effect (as to a second premise) to a still further effect in order to evolve a plan of action, builds up a day-dream of what she would prefer to happen, and generally fools herself into believing that that is what will happen. It is one of the limitations of the feminine part of humanity.

Mrs. Cogan had so blotted out the probability of Benton's presence being a menace, she rarely ever thought of him; and it was only when she had heard him—on one or two occasions—pass the closed dining room doors on his way to catch his train home, that she had felt a sudden clutch at her heart, which made her skin turn cold and clammy, and had awakened her to the fact that the menace was still a possibility.

In order to avoid a scene, Cogan had not mentioned Benton's name in the hearing of either his wife or Jack since the night of his first visit; had not even spoken of the progress the reconstruction of his play was making; and although his wife's curiosity had prompted her once or twice to inquire about it, the desire was quickly stifled by the fear that the actor's name would be injected into the conversation. One evening, however, Benton left for New York much earlier than usual, and Cogan came into the dining room where Jack was smoking and skimming over the evening news. He sat down heavily in a chair.

"Jack! Where's Kitty? Putting the youngster to bed?" he asked in a weary tone.

His brother-in-law glanced at him over the top of his

paper. "Yes, I think she is. Are you through for the evening?"

"Yeeah," yawned Cogan, wearily. "I am thoroughly tired out tonight. Gee! I could sleep for a week—I am so tired!"

"What's the matter?" Jack asked with a smile. "Have your friends, the cats, been keeping you awake again?"

"Oh, worse than cats! I've got my old enemy back again—insomnia," sighed Cogan. "Have you ever been troubled that way?"

Jack laughed. "No, thank goodness. The minute my head hits the hay, I am dead to the world."

"You are lucky! It's the bane of the brain worker's life! Here am I, yawning my blessed head off, and this big old hulk of mine tired to exhaustion; yet the minute I lie down in bed, the wheels in my cranium start off at a gallop, and I am more wide-awake than ever."

"Did you ever try that old gag of counting sheep?"

"Oh, man, man! I've tried everything!" he said disconsolately. "I've gone to bed on an empty stomach; I've gorged myself to surfeit; I've put my feet in hot water, in cold water, but with the same result. I've tried counting sheep, and the first thing I know is: I am shearing them, washing the wool, spinning and carding it, making it into cloth, showing the customer the goods, measuring him for a suit of clothes, cutting out the . . . "

"By Jove," broke in Jack with a laugh, "It must be pretty bad. Glad I'm not a brain-worker!"

"Well! . . . I shall soon be through now with my play; then perhaps things will ease up a bit."

"How is it coming, Tom?"

"Two or three evenings will about finish it, I think."

"I am glad for your sake, old man. I hope it will be a success."

"Well . . . I shall be very much astonished if it is'nt," replied Cogan. "It's a darned good play, even if I say it myself." He yawned loudly. "I think I'll go to bed, and see if I can get some sleep. Good night, old man."

"Hey! Before you go, Tom, I want to tell you something."

Cogan halted, and leaned wearily against the door-frame.

"Lie on your back, cross one foot over the other, and clasp your hands together over your tummy; then, close your eyelids lightly, and try to look at the inside of the back of your cranium."

"Yeh? All right; I'll be the goat! Where's the joke?"

"The joke is: you'll fall asleep in jig time," Jack explained. Cogan looked at him incredulously. "Go along now, and give it a trial—as teacher tells you to."

"All right; I'll try it," yawned Cogan, with an air of unbelief. "I'll try anything once."

"Yes, do. 'There are more things in heaven and earth,' Tom Cogan . . . "

XIV

Next afternoon, as Jack had gone to play tennis at the Club, and Harold was amusing himself in the garden, Mrs. Cogan took advantage of their absence to delve into the mysteries of her cook-book with a view to making something new and tasty in desserts. She had found a recipe that was simple and looked promising, and was reading it carefully when the front door bell rang.

"Oh pshaw!" she ejaculated in a tone of irritation. "I wonder what gossip this is now—coming to disturb me. There's no peace for the wicked."

She heard the servant usher the newcomer into the parlor, and tried to recognize the visitor's voice through the closed sliding doors, but without success. In a few moments, the servant appeared in the other doorway.

"It's Mr. Benton, ma'am," she announced.

"Mr. Benton?" she said, hardly daring to trust her hearing. "What does he want?"

"I told him the master wasn't in, but he said he wanted to see you, ma'am."

"Me?"

The servant nodded, then went into the kitchen.

Mrs. Cogan had been bending over the cook-book,

and as she turned to ask the question, her face was in shadow; so she hoped that Maggie hadn't noticed her change of color. She felt as white as a sheet! She stood for a moment, wondering what he wanted, and at *this* time of day. Perhaps he had made an appointment to meet her husband here—she thought.

"Strange that Tom didn't say anything to me about it! Oh, well, I'd better go and get it over," she muttered, frowning. She passed out into the hall, and entered the parlor.

The actor stood examining a framed photograph of herself which was on the small table. He turned to greet her suavely.

"I must apologize exceedingly for disturbing you, but . . . uh . . . in my haste last evening, I inadvertently left my notebook on Mr. Cogan's desk."

'Must be a very valuable notebook to induce you to make a special journey for it'—she thought, noticing the leer in his eyes. She guessed that he was lying, and wondered what the motive was. Bowing frigidly, she went to the door of the study to see if it was locked; for, sometimes, in his forgetfulness, Cogan would turn the key in the lock. She turned the handle, and threw open the door. With a curt wave of her hand, she indicated that he could enter and get his property.

"Ah, yes, there it is," he said, pointing to a small red diary on the desk. "I would not lose that for worlds! Do you know," he smirked, coming back into the parlor, "this is one of the most valuable books in my collection. One I should be extremely sorry to lose." He held the diary up for her to see it.

Still as a statue, she wondered what was coming.

"It is full of interesting items of—interesting places, of the interesting people I have met in the course of my travels, and the . . . uh . . . dates on which I had the pleasure of meeting them." He caressed the morocco binding with an exaggerated affectation of affection.

With an expression of boredom, she slowly turned to the door—as a hint that she was not interested.

"Do you know," he continued in a smooth, oily voice, "the other day I came across, among other very precious items, the date on which I first made your acquaintance."

She turned to face him, and drew herself up stiffly. "I am afraid that does not interest me in the slightest degree!"

"It doesn't?" he asked with an expression of astonishment. "Why . . . that was one of my red-letter days."

She frowned with impatience, and the hot color mounted into her face. "You will have to excuse me! I have other, and more important things to attend to." She turned to leave the room.

"One moment!" he insisted, putting up his jewelled hand to detain her. "I also found that I had marked the date on which I received your first letter. A very sweet letter it was, I well remember; as indeed . . they *all* were." His lips curled with a smile.

Her bosom began to heave. The letters she had written to him—she had forgotten all about them! They had been completely effaced from her memory. Now the long forgotten incidents came rushing into

her mind; arousing a feeling of anger for having written them, and at him for reminding her of her foolishness in the past.

"I have no desire to be reminded of the time when I was a foolish, stage-struck girl," she flashed in a bitter tone. "I am a woman now, and with a trifle more experience of the world."

"Ah . . . pardon me, but . . . I do not agree with you," he replied suavely. "You do yourself an injustice, a great injustice. Your letters were . . . I should say, *are* . . . very clever and exceedingly interesting. Many and many a time I have read them when I felt lonely, and needed . . . ah . . . consoling."

She stared at him blankly, a vague fear gripping her. "Do you mean . . that . . . you have kept . . . "

"Certainly I have kept them!" he exclaimed in mock astonishment. "Dear me," he added, as though chiding her playfully, "you do not think I would throw such charming epistles away, do you? No, indeed! Why, I have treasured them carefully and . . . tenderly, all these years!"

She was ready to drop! Her blood seemed to freeze in her veins; her heart seemed to stop! Her lips quivered nervously as she gazed at him, dumbfounded. He watched the agony in her face with a smile of satisfaction.

"Why cannot we be friends?" he asked in a seductive, pleading tone. "It would mean so much to me! I live such a lonely, loveless kind of existence, I should be glad to have you for a . . . *friend*." He put a delicate but unmistakable stress on the word. "Life is so short and fleeting; and friendships, especially renewed

friendships, are *so precious.*" He leered at her with half closed eyes.

She drew herself up haughtily. "I shall ask my husband to find another place where you can finish your work on his play," she said, stung into action.

Benton smiled cynically. "But wouldn't that only complicate matters . . . unnecessarily? For . . . naturally . . . he would want to know why, and . . . naturally . . . I . . should have to tell him the reason; and . . ." his lips curled in a cruel smile, "perhaps . . . most likely . . . I am afraid he would want to read the . . . letters."

"You beast! You coward!" she burst out in a voice shaking with fear.

"But, as I remarked before," he went on, unabashed, "if we are . . . *friends*, why . . . those letters could be a pleasant tie between us, and . . . I am very good at keeping secrets."

As the full meaning of his words sank into her mind, her dazed brain sought blindly for an avenue of escape from this insult to her womanhood. His keeping her letters all these years—for some such purpose as this, evidently—seemed to her as being the act of a cold-blooded fiend. While he watched the effect of his words, a thought came into her mind, and she caught at it with the hopefulness of despair.

Trying to affect a nonchalance she did not feel, she gave a short laugh. Her lip curled with a sneer as she said:

"You must think I am easy, or that you have a young inexperienced girl to deal with. To try to frighten me into believing that you have kept those

idiotic letters! You should give me credit for having a little more sense." She made a brave attempt to look scornfully at him.

He smiled condescendingly, and shrugged his shoulders lazily. "So you think I am lying, do you?"

"I don't think at all about it; I know you are, you cad!"

He chuckled softly, very much amused at her attempt to evade the net he was drawing around her. "Then your own eyes shall prove the contrary. You shall see them for yourself!" He bowed mockingly.

She reeled as though struck with a blow! Affecting not to notice her distress, he languidly stuck his monocle in his eye, took out his watch, and glanced at the time.

"Awfully sorry, but I must leave you. I have to catch my train," he drawled, walking leisurely to the door; "and pleasure, this time at any rate, must give way to business. So . . . for the present, *auf wiedersehen.*" He again bowed to her; then left the house.



Numb with fear, her brain reeling, she closed her eyes. It had come! The blow had fallen!

Her mind, bewildered with the shock of the announcement that her letters were still in existence and in his possession, was not so dulled as to prevent her seeing his purpose. He wanted her for a *friend!* She knew only too well what he meant, and her indig-

nation rose at the thought. The vile, low cur! She would inform her husband, as soon as he came home, of the proposal his gentlemanly guest had made to her, and see what *he* thought of it. She would not tolerate being insulted in her own house, not if she could help it! She would show him! She would insist on Tom kicking him out of the house that evening—play or no play! Her thoughts raced through her brain; and, giving them full rein, she rejoiced in the anticipation of Benton's humiliation. In her mind's eye, she could vision the berserk rage of her husband venting itself on her enemy, and she smiled, delighted with the picture.

But! . . . and then the clammy clutch of fear gripped her heart again! Those letters! What if he *did* have them? What if he *had* kept them? She had tried to read his eyes when she had as much as told him he was lying, and . . . she, tearfully, had to admit that he appeared confident—only too confident of his assertion. And . . . he said she should see them —with her own eyes, and be convinced that they were still in his possession. He wouldn't have said that if he didn't have them. There seemed to be no loop-hole of escape! God! what a fool she had been! What an idiotic fool she had been to write them! Only vaguely did she remember them; but she knew they were full of gush and foolish inanities such as hundreds of other stage-struck, matinee-idol-mashed, silly girls wrote to the ideal of their dreams—the stage hero. What a fool!

She could not recall with any definiteness the phrases in the letters, but she remembered how her hot, passionate young blood surged through her veins at that

period of her life, overfull with the undefined desires of budding womanhood; the demand of her strong sex nature seeking recognition and satisfaction; the call of the mother element welling forth from every part of her; the mother-love of countless generations focussed in her being, demanding utterance and expression in stalwart sons and graceful daughters.

She remembered how powerfully her emotional states at that time of her life possessed and affected her. How she had enjoyed using her facility and flow of language, coupled with her dramatic instinct, as a means to lessen the strain of her emotional temperament. The sex urge controlled her so imperatively, she had to have some outlet for its expression; and she saw, now, when it was too late, what a damning implication and meaning could be put on those words by the average man of the world. And Tom Cogan! Would he, even if he could, would he try to understand what the sex urge and emotions raging in her soul meant to her at that time; and, putting himself in her place, could he form any conception of such a condition? She knew in her innermost soul that such a thing was out of the question; that it was physically impossible for him—a man—to understand what the pent-up passion and yearning of a woman meant to her. Even Nature itself conspired against her! Whether she would or not, the law of her femininity forced the conditions upon her; she had no say in the matter. And while her soul and body desired to follow the dictates of her nature, there were the hard and fast and—to one of her passional type—cruel conventions of modern society to be con-

sidered and observed. Young men—from her point of view—were more fortunate. They had the license of the double standard of morality, and could sow their wild oats without being besmirched by conventional opinion; but a young woman,—she had to keep "straight;" to suffer and burn; or, if she gave way to her impulses—to follow the dictates of her nature, be condemned by both men and women!

No! She felt certain that it was useless to try to explain her moods, her emotions, her desires, her pangs of those days to her husband. She was convinced that her explanation of the affair would have but little weight with him; and, while she now congratulated herself on the fact that she had resisted all temptations to break the accepted conventional code, she dreaded with an overwhelming despair to think of the possibilities. She knew that side of her husband too well! She knew what strict ideas he held on the question; for she was aware that he—when commenting on the laxity of the modern woman, so different from his mother and the women of her circle—had boasted to his friends that he, for one at any rate, had been fortunate enough to marry a woman without a "past;" that his wife—he was proud to say—was one woman at whom no accusing finger could be pointed. The reflection that, however much appearances might be against her, she could say, and say truthfully: "I am innocent of any wrong-doing," gave her some consolation; but the thought of what the probable effect of her explanation would be, perturbed her. *What would he say?* The question seared her brain, and crushed her soul.

"Wath th' matter? Why ith 'oo cwying?" lisped her child. Unnoticed, he had come into the room, and now pulled at her skirt, looking with wondering eyes at her terror-stricken face.

With a sob of anguish, she sank to her knees, and gathering the child into her arms, convulsively pressed him to her bosom.

XV

The afternoon passed—somehow; how, she didn't know. She had thrown herself on the bed, to be alone with her misery; every nerve in her body aching with a dull, throbbing pain. Her head seemed on fire; her eyes felt as though a red-hot flame had scorched them, for her tears refused to flow.

"My usual sick headache," was what she told Cogan when he came to her room to inquire if she were ill. "Tell Maggie to do the best she can with the dinner, and tell her to send Harold up to bed early."

An hour or so later, Harold entered the bedroom and announced that Uncle Jack had gone out for the evening, and as Maggie was too busy to play with him, he had come to "vithit muvver."

"Bless your dear heart," his mother cried, clasping him in her arms. "You are Mumsie's own darling sweetheart, aren't you?"—caressing his golden curls.

The child nodded gravely. "Yeth, me mumthie'th thweetheart," he lisped.

"Mumsie'll put your nightie on; then you can lie in your little bed, and play sick like Mumsie."

"Ith 'oo thik?" he asked, softly touching her cheek as she unbuttoned his clothes.

The thoughts of the danger hanging over her

crowded into her mind. Swallowing the lump in her throat, she merely nodded in answer to the boy's question.

"*Why* ith 'oo thik?" the child insisted.

Recognizing the futility of trying to answer the question, she looked at him with a faraway gaze. Then, as another and hitherto unthought-of phase of the problem presented itself to her wearied mind, her eyes focussed on the boy's face; and, as the thought grew, she felt like shrieking aloud in her agony.

Whenever she had pondered over the disclosure of her correspondence with Benton, the effect that that disclosure would have on her husband had been the one and only thought uppermost in her mind. It had not occurred to her that it might have a further and more important result; that it might affect her more seriously than merely a separation from her husband. That, in all conscience, would be a blow quite hard enough to bear; but . . .

Her eyes opened wide, aghast with horror as she realized now that Cogan would, on separating from her, take the child with him; that not only would she lose her husband, but also lose that which was infinitely more precious to her than life itself—her boy!

She was stunned! All that made her home a heaven on earth, that made life worth the living, would be snatched away from her. Oh! dear God in heaven! Was that to be the outcome of her folly? Was she to lose her child? The child for whom she had nearly given her life when it was born; at whose sick-bed she had watched for a week of sleeplessness and anxiety; a week of which every moment was a living hell! The

boy she idolized; the one great passion of her life; literally a part of her own body, yea, of her very soul; to be torn from her because of the deviltry of this fiend—Benton? *Was that to be her Cross? Her Gethsemane?*

She gazed in hopeless terror at the boy, now almost asleep; his little form nestling in her arm; his chubby fingers lightly clasping hers; his curly head pillowed on her breast.

A curiously strange, indefinable feeling crept over her.

It seemed as if something inside her had changed; as though some unknown element deeply hidden within her had come to the surface of her being. A feeling of detachment from her personality;—as if she—the soul, the thinking entity—stood apart from her physical body, and looked down on her troubled mind from an impersonal point of view.

Soft, electric-like waves swept through her with a delicate, tremulous touch which left a feeling of coldness on her warm skin, and made the muscles and nerve-fibres taut and rigid. Her eyes opened wide with a fixed stare. The room seemed filled with strange *presences, presences* she did not recognize but who were strangely familiar to her; as if she had known them *sometime*, but could not remember when or where. As they moved around her, gently jostling each other in their desire to help her, she felt attuned to *them*, and gave *them* an unspoken welcome. Their coming seemed to be a matter of course; nothing out of the ordinary, but something to be expected at such a time and under such conditions. The question as to who

they were arose in her mind for a moment; but the next instant it was forgotten in the gentle clamoring of the vague shapes pressing their attentions on her.

Out of the babel of whisperings that surrounded her, —whisperings which conveyed to her advice of various sorts coupled with condolences,—a voice stronger and clearer than the others made itself heard. Apparently, it came from one of greater authority than the rest, for the voices gradually sank to soft mutterings, leaving the one as spokesman.

"Benton, like all his kind, is a sore and a canker on the body social; a cancerous growth in the healthy, living tissues of human society. For the cancer in a physical body, extending its tentacles in the healthy flesh from which it derives its nourishment, there is but *one* remedy, and *only one*: to cut it out by the roots, sever its connections with its victim, and—*destroy it!* So with this Benton; this fiend; this human cancer! There is but *one way* to stop his baneful, malignant growth, and that is, to *kill him;* to cut him out of the body of Humanity on which he is a festering gangrene; to blot him out without the slightest compunction, and so rid society of a damnable pest!"

Such was the tenor of the advice which seemed to come from the *presence* behind her; bending over her shoulder to whisper in her ear. The vague forms of the other *presences* around her nodded in agreement.

The *voice* continued in a cold, judicial tone:

"You, who know this reptile and his power for doing harm to others as also to yourself, will be benefitting society by wiping out this lecherous vampire from the face of the earth. You know that this city,

nay, the whole country, the whole world, is full of his kind; respectable men to all outward appearance, some of them in high positions, in so-called 'best' society, in places of power, yes, even in the churches and religious bodies—which should be sacred!—you can find his kind contaminating, seducing, destroying young men and maidens. If you, who know this man and his abominable life will not raise a hand to stop his devilment, you are as much responsible for his career as if you helped him in his wickedness. By allowing this man to live, you are giving him more opportunities to continue his evil-doing. On the great Judgment Day, God will demand a reckoning from you. What will you say?"

At the name of God, all the *presences* bowed to the ground in humble obeisance.

The child, pillowed on her breast, gave a nervous shudder, and reaching its little hand toward her face, sighed tremulously.

She came out of her reverie with a start, and sat bolt upright. Her nervous system strained to the verge of breaking, the pupils of her eyes contracted almost to pin-points, she appeared to be a different woman from the normal, passionate, fun-loving Mrs. Cogan of other days. She herself was partly aware of the change, and she noted with a curious feeling of satisfaction that her heart was beating with its usual steadiness and at its ordinary speed; that although she felt calm and dispassionate, her body seemed as if made of steel. Glancing at her boy, his head now in the hollow of her arm, she saw that he was sleeping peacefully. Carrying him tenderly to his

own little crib near her bed, she gently laid him down; observing with a smile that her actions were governed by a deliberation which was foreign to her. She felt immensely pleased at the discovery.

Standing at the side of the crib, gazing down on her child, she went over everything that the *presence* had said. She remembered every word, every inflection, every cold, biting phrase; and as she repeated it to herself, she admitted the cogency of the statement.

"Yes . . . what shall I say when God asks me?" she queried inwardly, conjuring up the picture of a human-shaped Being sitting on a throne surrounded by angels with wings, judging the righteous and the unrighteous; separating the sheep from the goats on the great "Last Day"—the Day of Judgment; a picture implanted in her mind by the religious training of her childhood. She shuddered, dismayed at the prospect of being cast into everlasting darkness, and being separated from her child—for all eternity!

Undressing herself slowly,—for the strange sense of unnatural calm affected her,—she got into her own bed, and lay there endeavoring to evolve a plan to defeat Benton's machinations against her honor and her happiness.

Wild schemes presented themselves to her imagination.

She speculated on the possibilities of entering his hotel rooms while he was busy some evening in her husband's study, and ransacking his belongings with the hope of discovering her letters and burning them. While working out the details of this plan, another,

and yet other extravagant ideas for revenge occurred to her. Fortunately for her sanity, Nature finally asserted itself, and sleep, thrice blessed sleep, came to soothe her overstrained nerves and fevered brain.

The next day she felt ill and tired, and sick from exhaustion.

Before leaving for his office, Cogan had come into her room early in the morning, to kiss her and ask her how she was; the shades being down, he did not notice how drawn and worn-out she appeared.

"Can I do or get anything for you," he asked, leaning over the bed and caressing her hand awkwardly.

Like most men of large, muscular build, he was ill at ease in a sickroom; he was out of place. Blessed with a strong, virile body, sickness was something he could not understand; nor could he muster any sympathy for the sufferer. Used to the rude buffetings of the world, he enjoyed the hurly-burly—the blows given him by Nature and Man, returning them in kind to the latter, if possible—and gloried in his physical well-being; with the opposite—weakness or ill-health, which he looked upon as being a sort of crime,—he had no sympathy whatever; it did not belong to his scheme of things. So he was relieved to hear her say:

"No, Tom; I'll be all right in an hour or so. I

didn't sleep well last night—had a headache, and—I'll be up in an hour or so."

"All right, old girl,"—he bent down and kissed her forehead, "have a good snooze; you'll be all right then."

At the door he stopped, and turned with a final question—as though he had only just then thought of it. "Shall I 'phone to the doctor?"

"No. Don't be silly, Tom! I only want to rest for a little while, that's all."

Just before noon she dragged her weary, aching body out of bed, dressed, and went downstairs to the dining room; her face so drawn with suffering that her brother postponed his proposed journey to town, and concluded he would stay at home. Intuitively he had connected his sister's careworn face with Benton, feeling sure that there was something in her acquaintance with him which she was afraid to make known. He wondered what it could be. Later in the day, a chance remark of Harold's to the effect that "that man" Daddy brought had been there the previous afternoon convinced Jack that his surmise was correct, and that he had the clue to her indisposition.

"I thought you were going to town today, Jack," his sister said, when she heard him invite Harold out for a game of ball on the lawn.

"I did intend going, Kitty; but . . . I don't know,"—forcing a lazy yawn. "I don't feel quite up to the mark. Guess I am living too high."

But when he went out with the boy, she marked the supple swing of his lithe body as he picked up the youngster with one hand, and set him astride his

shoulders. There was no lack of healthy vigor in his movements as far as she could see; he looked "fit" to her. Guessing that his excuse for staying at home was not the true reason, nevertheless, she was content not to push the inquiry any further; feeling, with a sense of security, that she would be glad to have him near—in case the actor paid her another surprise visit.

To a healthy young man of athletic build and restless physical energy, dawdling around a house all day with nothing particular to do is somewhat of a penance, and likely to get monotonous. Jack soon began to find time hanging heavily on his hands, for the boy's play was not strenuous enough for one of his energetic nature, and he longed for the smashing and volleying of the tennis court. Harold's remark regarding Benton's visit, and the sight of his sister's wan troubled face, however, made him hold to his resolution of "sticking around" for awhile.

Luncheon finished, he announced his intention of lying down on the Mission lounge in the parlor, saying, as an excuse, "I am logy and dopey. My liver must be on the blink!" With an air of lassitude he glanced over the titles of the books in the bookcase, looking for something to read and while away the time.

"Oh, Kitty!" he called, "what was the name of that book you said would interest me? Something about 'occult arts' or some such thing."

"You mean 'Magic—Black and White,'" she answered, coming into the parlor. I'll get it for you; I know exactly where it is." She opened the case, and

found the book. "This is the one. I think you will find it very interesting."

"Thanks," he said. He grasped her fingers that held the book, and looked her squarely in the eyes, questioningly.

Her woman's intuition caught the meaning of his action. Her eyes dropped, and with a deep sigh she said, softly, "Not now! I cannot tell you now. Some other time, Jack."

He made no answer other than to squeeze her hand gently. She gave him a look of gratitude, then turned away and went upstairs.

For all his strength and good intentions, Jack was helpless! He was certain, however, that his guess of Benton being at the bottom of the affair was correct. His knuckles showed white as he clinched his fists. So far as he could see, it was evident that Cogan was not aware of this affair between his wife and Benton; and it was quite as evident that she had no intention of acquainting her husband with the matter. If she had had any such purpose, she would have informed him before this; and he certainly would not bring the actor to his house night after night after having been told what had happened. Apparently, it was something she did not dare tell her husband!

What could that something be?

Unwilling to harbor the thought, the cruel suspicion forced itself into his mind. It could mean only one thing: his sister had had compromising relations with this Benton before her marriage; and now, for some reason or other, the actor was using the power that liaison gave him to bedevil and threaten her in some

way;—what way, he could not even hazard a guess. The thought of his sister—half-sister, it is true, but nevertheless his sister—having anything to do with the reptile, and in such a relation, sickened and disgusted him; but as he pondered over the possibility of her being in Benton's toils and perhaps at his mercy, Jack's face hardened and a tense, grim smile played over his lips. Seeing that Cogan was not supposed to know, and therefore unable to take a hand in the game, he—Jack Waller—*he* would attend to Benton's case! A woman was no match for such a scoundrel; the business called for a man who could handle a man's size job; and it gave him a pleasurable sensation to reflect that it would give him the opportunity to finish the job he had started when he punched the actor on board ship.

Extending his arms and shutting his fists tightly, he tensed his muscles, then brought his fists smartly to his shoulders. He noted with satisfaction how the hard muscles rippled beneath the smooth skin, even those of the arm that had been wounded responding to his command with only a slight stiffness consequent on the setting of the bone; and, as he assured himself, the two weeks of his holiday which were yet to come before his time of leave expired, would give him ample time to put Benton down and out, so far as annoying his sister was concerned.

Throwing himself on the couch, he opened the book, inwardly praying that Benton would repeat his afternoon's visit, and so give him the longed-for opportunity of thrashing him within an inch of his life. He would show him! He'd give him a lesson the actor

would never forget this side of the grave! He'd teach him to avoid *this* house in the future! After all the excitement of the front, he felt out of place in this peaceful village, where the only flutter a fellow with red blood in his veins could get was the reading of the stunts some of his pals in the Aviation Squadron were pulling off; and he welcomed the idea of using some of his excess energy in manhandling Benton, at the same time giving himself some real enjoyment and entertainment. "I'll give him a nice scientific lacing—first, then I'll hand him a few smashes that'll put him in the hospital for a few weeks!" With which blood-thirsty promise he dismissed the matter from his mind, and tried to get interested in the book; but its small print together with his recumbent position—unaccustomed at this time of the day—made reading out of the question, and he found it difficult to keep his eyes open. Accepting the inevitable, he closed the book, and sank into a heavy slumber.

When he awoke, it was to find that Cogan had telephoned home to tell his wife that he would be detained in his office, and would not be home to dinner; also that he had notified Benton to call the work on the play off for the evening, as Cogan did not know how late he would be.

Jack noticed the sense of relief in his sister's voice when she told him the actor would not come that evening.

After they had had dinner, she went up stairs to put the boy to bed; and Jack feeling the need of fresh air and exercise, stood at the front door debating what he should do. Nothing would have

pleased him more than a brisk walk for an hour or two—to shake out the kinks in his muscles, and clear the cobwebs from his brain. Undecided, he lit a cigar and strolled aimlessly down the steps and on to the lawn, continuing slowly around the gable end of the house—toward the rear of the garden.

He stood meditatively watching the stars as they gradually made their appearance in the now darkening eastern sky; now twinkling faintly, now lost; then shining out more clearly as the warm light waned. The wonder and glory of the twilight, shimmering with its unearthly light, a light that seemed to belong to the borderland between earth and heaven, always fascinated him. It lifted him out of the crude garish things of the day, and filled his soul with awe. The tender coloring, the lavender greys pervaded by soft tints and flushes of rose and dull orange; the tones with their subtle nuances, delicately merging one into the other, and all veiled by a filmy, tremulous green greyness which gave the effect of other-worldness,—its unreality, its illusiveness, its dreamy quality.

He always felt uplifted at the sight of the limpid depths percolated with living light; and now, as the sky began to darken to a violet mystery, and the hosts of heaven commenced their evening song of praise, he raised his head, humbly, yet with a great and holy pride, to think that he, too, was a part of this glory, this wonder, this magnificent display of Power.

Absorbing the beauty of the scene, he wondered—with a feeling of sadness—why human beings should waste their lives seeking and fighting for the puerilities of existence; the things of a day, the things of little

worth, the toys and baubles of ordinary life, when they could— if they only would—get nearer to the fundamentals of life, and know more of the realities and verities of human existence. (Yes, this was the same young man, the same Jack Waller who, only a few hours before, had contemplated with delight on the pleasure he expected to derive from handing Benton a "few smashes that'll put him in the hospital for a few weeks!")

This phase of his character which was always evoked by the beauty of Nature, beautiful pictures, and sublime passages in poetry and other literature, was unknown to his friends; indeed, it was but little known to himself; for while profoundly affected by the emotions that state of mind produced in him, he felt—after the emotion had passed—as though he had given way to something akin to feminine weakness, and which he feared was unmanly. As for exhibiting those emotions, or allowing his intimates to know that he felt them, that was out of the question. Speaking precisely, it had been out of the question up to the time he had gone to France and joined the Escadrille. There he acquired a new viewpoint, and discovered—to his delight and inward joy—that deep religious feeling instead of being incompatible with manliness was, in truth, the element in a man which made for brotherhood, and tended to not only uplift a man, but was the only real basis on which to build a lasting and better manhood.

His present emotional state affected him deeply, and, forgetting for the time Benton and his anger

against him, he breathed a deep sigh of peaceful content.

A man came up the garden path to the front of the house, walked up the "stoop," hesitated a moment in the open doorway, then disappeared in the dimly lighted parlor. He had been there only a moment or two when Mrs. Cogan came down the stairs. Hearing the footsteps and thinking it was her brother who had entered, she went in.

"Why don't you put the light on?" she asked, pushing the switch button. "That's more cheerful, isn't it?"

A smile on her lips, she turned to face . . . Benton!

The shock of the surprise sent all the color from her face when, with a look of stupefaction, she saw who it was.

"I am sorry to take you by surprise, but . . . er . . . I saw the door was open, and . . . er . . . I walked in expecting to find your husband in his study as usual," was his glib apology.

"Mr. Cogan telephoned to you not to come this evening," she said in an icy tone, trying to regain her composure.

"He did?" He looked at her with a well-feigned air of astonishment. "Strange they didn't give me the message at my hotel!"

He glanced at her from under his lids to see how

she took his explanation. She stood staring at him, frigidly.

"Well . . . er . . . since I am here, I may as well do some of the work I still have to do on the play. That is," he added hurriedly, "if *you* have no objection."

"I do not interfere with my husband's affairs," she replied coldly. "The door is open, and you probably can turn on the lights."

She turned swiftly to leave the room. He held up a detaining hand.

"Pardon . . . just a moment! I have brought something with me that I wish to show you."

He took out of his breast pocket a small package of old letters, tied with a narrow pale-blue ribbon. With an ironic smile, he held the package so that she could read the writing on the top envelope.

It was her own handwriting! She recognized the color, now faded, of the envelope—a delicate lavender tint, a color she had much affected years ago.

Fascinated, her eyes followed the curves of the writing, full as they were of her personal touches, even to the strong thick line underscoring the name; a little affectation of masculine accentuation she used to be so proud of! At the sight of them, all her elaborate plans and schemes for thwarting him crumpled into nothingness. She was beaten! The previous afternoon she had put up the best bluff she knew; now he called her bluff with the winning cards in his hand. Yes! she was done; and as the full realization of the fact and what it meant for her dawned on her mind, her head sank slowly.

His thin lips curled with a cruel sneer. "You thought I was lying to you, yesterday; didn't you?" he asked, triumphantly. "If my memory serves me, you as much as told me so—yesterday. Here is your answer! What do you think of it?"

Yes, that was her answer! She could not gainsay it! She could do nothing except . . . and she inwardly moaned as she recognized the futility of the suggestion which came into her mind . . . except throw herself on his mercy. His mercy!—she reflected bitterly; but, so far as she could see, there was nothing left but that.

"Won't you be man enough to return them to me?" she pleaded. "If you have the slightest shred of honor in you, you will give them to me . . . at once?"

He looked at the package affectionately. Turning it, he ran his finger over the corners, slowly, to show her what a number of letters were there. Still turning the package slowly, so that she could see every part of it, he said softly:

"These letters mean so much to me. To me, they are worth their weight in gold!"

"Then name your price, and I will buy them!" she exclaimed, a gleam of hope in her eyes. "How much money do you want for them?"

He chuckled joyously, enjoying her distress. "Oh, tut, tut! Money? I don't need money. *Money* won't buy these," he said in a definite tone, shaking his head; "but . . . your love will! Come to my apartment, and I'll *give* them to you." He leered at her with a lecherous grin.

Her breath coming in quick gasps, she stood as though stricken; looking at him with a hunted expression on her drawn pale face.

XVI.

Jack's meditations on the beauty of the twilight came to an abrupt end when, on turning toward the house, he saw the light from the window of Cogan's study shining on the shrubbery outside.

"Good news!" he muttered, walking toward the window. "Tom must have come home sooner than he expected. I'll get him to come for a stroll."

He paused at the window to greet Cogan—whom he expected to see at his desk, a jocular remark ready on his lips. His delight at the expectation of having the company of his brother-in-law quickly changed when he saw, through the open doorway of the study, his sister with an agonized expression standing before Benton who was languidly tapping the package of letters with his fat fingers.

"Well . . . I'll be damned!" he exploded. "That cursed skunk again! When the hell did *he* get here? By all the gods, I'll settle you this time if I have to break your neck!" Flaming with anger he made his way swiftly to the front of the house.

Turning the corner, he heard the front gate shut with a loud clang, and recognized the burly figure of Cogan striding up the path. Instinctively, he drew back into the shadows of the shrubbery. He realized

that he could not, at this time, interfere between his sister and Benton without apprising Cogan of the reason, thereby exposing Mrs. Cogan's secret to her husband. On the other hand, if Cogan surprised them in the parlor and discovered the facts for himself, he, as her husband, would be in a position to say what should be done in the matter. In either case, Jack saw that for the moment anyway his hands were tied, and he could take no action.

Inside, in the parlor, both the actor and Mrs. Cogan heard the gate slam; and as the latter recognized her husband's forcible way of closing the gate, she turned deathly white and glanced with terror-stricken eyes toward the door. Guessing from the expression of her face that the footsteps approaching the house were her husband's, the actor said in a low tone:

"I shall expect your answer tomorrow afternoon . . . *at my hotel.* For your sake I hope you will come, otherwise . . ."

He slipped quickly into the study, and having put on the lights, leisurely began taking off his gloves.

Mrs. Cogan, weak and trembling with fear, opened the sliding doors sufficiently to allow her to pass into the dining room. She closed them as her husband stepped into the house.

Hanging his hat on its peg in the hall, Cogan caught sight of the light in his study. Without waiting to take off his light overcoat, he proceeded into the parlor.

"Hello, Benton, old fellow!" he ejaculated, entering his den. "How long have you been here?"

The actor turned to greet him. "I have only just

arrived. Awfully sorry, but I couldn't get down earlier—I was detained in town."

"But . . . didn't you get my phone message?"

"Phone message? No! What was it?" he inquired with an assumption of innocence.

"Everything at my place got all balled up, and I expected to be very late tonight; so I phoned your hotel to ask you not to come this evening."

"You did? Strange they didn't tell me," said Benton with a perplexed look. "That confounded switch girl! This is the second time it has happened. I shall complain to the manager; giving me this journey for nothing!"

"Tut, tut! I am glad now that you did not get it," Cogan responded heartily. "We can almost finish this tonight," pointing to the manuscript.

"Are you sure it will not interfere with your arrangements?"

"On the contrary," replied Cogan. "I have had my dinner, so we can start right in."

From his point of vantage in the shadow of the bushes, Jack had noticed his sister's expression of dismay when she heard her husband's footsteps; had seen, too, how she had crumpled up at what was—judging from his motions with the letters—Benton's threat to expose her. He had observed the actor's quick action of putting on the light in the study, and his sister's rapid

exit and quick closing of the sliding doors. Her actions clearly indicated her guilt! The situation perplexed and stunned him! He swayed to and fro in anger at his own helplessness, and, cursing his luck, strode back to where, a few minutes before, he had been peacefully observing the stars.

"Now, what the devil shall I do?" he growled savagely, walking nervously to and fro. "And how can I get hold of him without letting Cogan know of this rotten business?" He cursed his stupidity for not having stayed near the front of the house where he could have seen Benton's arrival. "Those letters he's got . . . I'll bet they are hers, and he is using them as a club over her—the cursed rip! So . . ." he paused and nodded sagely, "I must get those letters from him . . .if I have to throttle him . . . but . . . get them I will!"

Pacing from one end of the house to the other, his hot anger gradually subsided, and gave place to cool deliberation. "How am I to get hold of them? That's the question!" he put to himself. Soon the problem resolved itself, and he smiled grimly. "Of course . . . that's it! That's the idea!"

He viciously punched the atmosphere with his fist, and bared his teeth with a quick intake of his breath.

"I'll wait for you, my nibs; and . . . then I'll get you!"

To make sure that he would not again miss his quarry, he strode with silent tread along the narrow strip of close cropped grass running the length of the house; glancing at the window of Cogan's study as he passed.

Mrs. Cogan stood in fear and trembling at the crack between the sliding doors to hear what was said when her husband discovered the actor's presence. Hearing him express his satisfaction at the actor being there, and announcing his intention of getting to work on the play, she saw there was nothing else for her to do but to go up to her bedroom, if only to avoid hearing her enemy's hateful voice, and Jack's inquiries in the event of his coming in. She was so utterly miserable, she did not wish her brother to see her; for he could not help noticing that something was wrong, and she was in no mood to answer questions—not even Jack's.

Cogan, too, was in a state of nervous tension. Everything in the editorial rooms of the *Manhattan Short Story Magazine* had gone wrong that day. Owing to some unaccountable freak, about a dozen half-tone plates had been made the wrong sizes. The plates were reproductions of various illustrations—some in two colors—which were needed by the printers to go to press the following day. Being the week when all the photo-engravers were chock-a-block with orders from the other magazines, and working overtime to get the finished plates to their customers, Cogan's anger was excusable; for the predicament he was placed in of holding up the printers—who mapped out their time to coincide with the receiving of "copy"—was a serious one, not to say anything of the magazine being four or five days late on the newsstands—which meant some financial loss.

Benton noticed his quick, irritable manner. "What is all the excitement?" he asked languidly. "You are as nervous as an actor on the opening night!"

In short, detached sentences, Cogan told him of the troubles with the magazine.

"What is the use of worrying about it?" questioned the actor. "'If 'tis done, 'tis done, and there's an end on't,'" he quoted.

"I know it is asinine, but I'm that kind of animal," the editor replied testily. "I work myself into a passion, then when it is over, I am like a rag, and all in; nervous and irritable, and not fit for decent society. I could kick the stuffing out of . . ." He stopped short with a quick nervous gesture of disgust. "Gol . . . darn it!" he snapped irascibly, glancing toward the window. "That blasted racket again!"

Benton pricked up his ears to listen to the yowling of two cats outside. "Does that annoy you?" he inquired with an easy laugh.

"If you were kept awake night after night by their infernal yelling, I'll guarantee that you'd feel annoyed. It is perfectly exasperating—blast them!"

The actor smiled tranquilly. "If they annoyed me to that extent, I'd get a nice steel gin-trap, and give them their quietus." He snapped his fingers with a languid gesture to give point to his suggestion.

Cogan put up with the noise for a few moments more, then threw open the window and poked his head out to see if he could locate their whereabouts. His eye fell on Jack who, half a dozen paces away, had halted in his walk to learn the meaning of the window being opened.

"Oh, Jack, old chap! I'm feeling rotten tonight—on edge. I wish you would do me a favor, and scare those damned cats away."

"Hmph!" grunted Jack. "If I had my gun here, I'd settle their hash for them! The beggars woke me last night with their music."

A bright idea struck Cogan. "Wait a moment, Jack," he called. Opening the drawer of his desk, he took out his automatic revolver. "By gad, that's the scheme!" he muttered.

The actor saw the action, and his sallow face paled at the sight of the weapon.

"Why . . . what are you going to do with that?" he asked, looking suspiciously at the editor. He had heard Jack's voice outside, but had not caught the words, and for the moment he was slightly perturbed.

Cogan was so full of his desire to have the noise stopped that he did not answer, but leaned out of the window to call to his brother-in-law.

"Here you are, old man; here's my gun. Catch! Go ahead and let us see what kind of a shot you are."

He threw the revolver to his brother-in-law, then closed the window, and pulled down the shade.

After examining the weapon, Jack went stealthily toward the fence where the cats were yowling at each other under the bushes. Their amorous vocalizing was disturbed by a bullet splintering the fence, missing the principal performer by an inch or so.

"Hm . . . might be better; but not so bad," thought Jack; "considering that I don't know the gun. Near enough, anyhow, especially with a bigger target," he muttered, the thought of Benton flashing across his mind.

Going to the window to return the revolver to Co-

gan, he found the window closed and the shade drawn; he wondered what he should do with it.

"Perhaps I had better hang on to it," he soliloquized finally, dropping it into his pocket. "It may come in handy—if only to throw a scare into him."

He had resumed his walk for but a few steps when he suddenly stopped—why, he did not know, and turned on his heel to take the weapon into the house—to a place of safety.

"I guess I don't need it," he muttered with a short laugh. "I can manage him without a gun; besides . ." He left the sentence incompleted.

XVII

Sitting at her bedroom window, alone but for her boy sleeping peacefully in his crib, Mrs. Cogan was going over in her mind, with endless repetitions, the various aspects of the hideous position in which she found herself. The deeper she delved seeking a solution, the more entangled the maze appeared to be. Apparently, there was no escape for her; nothing but disgrace and misery. That, or—and the thought of the alternative made her shudder—giving herself up to the man she hated, and buying his silence with her honor.

The situation appalled her!

Perhaps—she thought—it would be better to draw from the bank the few dollars she had in her name, write a letter of farewell explaining her reasons to her husband, and go to some small town in the West or South where she could be out of the reach of Benton. She should have no difficulty in finding work of some description which would enable her to keep body and soul together. Anything was better than to be disgraced by this man who had her in his clutches; but . . . there was her child . . . what of him? Why should she exile herself because . . .

Suddenly, the sound of a revolver split the air!

She sprang up, a new terror gripping her. "My God! what is that?" she gasped, throwing the curtains aside to look through the window.

She heard the crunch of footsteps on the gravel walk, and caught a glimpse of a man's shadow disappearing around the corner of the house.

Shaking with fear, she flew down the stairs and ran out on the porch. She met her brother coming up the stoop, the smoking revolver in his hand.

"What . . . what's the matter, Jack?" she cried in alarm; then, catching sight of the automatic, "God! Jack!" she panted, "what . . . have you . . . done?"

Her brother eyed her curiously, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing, nothing! Tom's nerves are on the blink tonight, and those darned cats he has been complaining of were annoying him; so—I took a pot-shot at them. That's all!"—significantly.

His sister leaned against the column of the porch, and pressed her hand to her heart. Her breath came in short, quick gasps.

"Oh! . . . My! . . . How you startled me!"

Jack pretended not to notice her distress. Not wishing to add to her discomposure by his presence in the house, and perhaps at the same time run the risk of missing Benton, he held out the automatic to her.

"This belongs to Tom, and I don't want to disturb him now," he explained. "Take it in with you, Kitty, and put it somewhere." He gave a short laugh as

he turned away. "I might be tempted to take a shot at some other animal!" he blurted; cursing himself a moment later for an inconsiderate fool for letting his tongue get the better of his discretion. His sister glanced at him, and mechanically took the revolver. She knew what "other animal" he referred to. Jack walked slowly down the steps, and on to the lawn to continue his vigil.

His sister stood for a few moments staring blankly at the automatic in her hand; then, as though in a trance, her mind far away, quietly went into the house. Weak and exhausted with the reaction, she paused at the foot of the stairs. Benton's resonant voice came through the half open door of the study. She heard him say: "And that reminds me of a corking good yarn!"

With bated breath, and heart pumping wildly, consumed with anxiety to hear if they referred to her, she tried to catch the words. He related some jocular incident, apparently, for at the conclusion both he and Cogan laughed with evident enjoyment.

His voice grated on her unstrung nerves. The callous scoundrel! Cracking funny jokes while she was going through the torments of hell! Her whole being revolted at his cold-bloodedness; and as she dragged herself up the stairs wearily, every nerve and every fibre crying out in pain, her head swimming with dizziness, the peculiar strange feeling of detachment she had experienced the previous night, seemed to steal over and become a part of her. Such a fiend had no right to be on earth; to make life a hell for others!

If God is a God of Justice (and the question came into her mind with a sceptical laugh), why did He allow this human hyena, this infamous villain, this devil in human form, to spin his web to ensnare her and hers?

In an absent-minded way, she laid the revolver on the small table near the window and stood, staring with unseeing eyes at the moonlit landscape outside. The slight swaying of the tree-tops, the thin wisp of smoke ascending lazily from some house behind the trees, the sounds—vague and murmuring—of the placid night, all seemed to add to the feeling of detachment; she seemed to be *of* her body, but not *in it*. As if, in some inexplicable way, she was apart from and yet in touch with it. The thoughts of last night came crowding in upon her; coming even from the outside and from every corner. At first in vague, unconnected whisperings—hints, suggestions and, now and then, mystic touchings on her skin; then, suddenly, they seemed to take definite forms and phrases, marshalling themselves in harrowing sequences of inexorable logic, the spokesman of the evening before being heard above the other *voices*.

"*You* know that he will stop at nothing to gain his ends! *You* know, too, that if you do not do as he desires—become his mistress, his plaything, his drab—he will take his revenge on you with no more compunction than he would have in killing a fly. All he cares about is your husband's play, and after he gets that, why should he care about you or your home? And you, *you* will have to stand the blame, *you* will have

to pay the price; for with his damnable sophistry, he can play on your husband's feelings as to make him believe he was doing him a favor in showing him the letters. The blackguard is clever and cunning enough! *If he does . . . what will be the result?*"

In answer to some unbidden impulse, she turned to look on her child sleeping peacefully.

"What will be the result?" reiterated the *voice* which seemed to be near her.

The room filled with ghostly *presences.* Their proximity made her skin creep with waves of cold, electric-like quivers. She could feel them pressing against her on all sides, each asking in tense whispers the same question: "*What will be the result?*"

Slowly turning again to the window, as if to seek the answer, her hand accidently touched the revolver, and her fingers mechanically closed on it. Absentmindedly her eyes dropped to see what it was. With a quick catch of her breath, she unloosed her grasp of the weapon, and recoiled in repulsion.

"Oh! . . . Good heavens! . . . Not that! . . . Oh! . . what am I thinking of?" she muttered fearfully at the trend of her thoughts.

The child in its little crib, dreaming, restlessly moved, and lisped inarticulate babble in its sleep. The sound stabbed her to the quick! Adding to the poignancy of her despair, it brought her to the realization of the immediacy of her problem.

"*What will be the result?*" asked the insistent *voice* at her side. On all sides, from innumerable *voices,* came the same insistent question: "*What will be the result?*"

A hideous picture began to unfold itself to her mind's eye—as though in answer to the query.

She saw Benton take out the package of letters from his pocket, untie the narrow faded ribbon, and give them, one by one, to Cogan to read; explaining, with an apologetic air of regret, that he was doing it merely because he considered it his duty—as a true friend. She saw her husband's troubled look of wonderment; saw his face change—as he read the letters one after another—to disappointment, disgust, and, finally, to furious anger.

The scene of her standing before him, shamefaced and with bowed head, listening to him violently denouncing her in scathing language, while Benton in the doorway gloated over her anguish—came vividly before her mental vision.

She could see her husband glaring in astonishment at her . . . hear him ask in a tense voice full of suppressed anger, "Did *you* write these letters?" . . . she could see herself trying to find words to explain, the basilisk gaze of Benton paralyzing her so that she was utterly unable to frame a sentence . . . "Did you write these letters?" . . . her husband yells the question at her! . . . she is on her knees . . . in detached, broken words pleading for forgiveness . . . her child runs into the room . . . into her arms . . . her husband tears him away from her . . . she implores for mercy. "Do anything with me; send me away but . . . for God's sake . . . let me have my child!" . . . and his answer, cutting and cold, "Give my boy to you? To teach him to be a liar and a hypocrite? I'd sooner see him

dead. Go! Leave this house before . . . I harm you . . . You are not a fit mother for *my* child" . . . *my* child, not *her* child! God in heaven, what should she do? . . . She saw herself drag her cowering body to where her brother stood . . . she heard her agonized appeal to him to intercede for her . . . and . . . saw him turn away in loathing! . . . her brother, whom she loved so much, and who, she thought, loved her . . . the devilish, cynical grin of that fiend Benton mocking her . . . torturing her . . . driving her insane . . .

The phantasmagoria stood out with a definite distinctness in all its atrocious details; and, for the time being, she merged herself into the pictures evoked by her own disordered brain.

Her fingers again closed on the revolver; *and again the strange, cold feeling enveloped her.*

The uncanny stillness of the night was broken by Benton's insufferable laugh. She shivered at the sound! He hadn't laughed so loudly, so extravagantly before tonight! His irritating laugh, which seemed to fill every crevice of the room and every corner of the night, now bore a double meaning for her . . . Now she knew *why* he laughed so outrageously . . . *Now* she knew the real significance of his merriment! The jokes he was relating to Cogan were merely an excuse to cover the *real* cause of his hilarity. *That was the real meaning of his laughter!* He was gloating over her distress, her helplessness, her impotence, her inability to thwart him. *That was the real joke that caused his merriment!* No wonder he laughed! The devil. His cachinnations stung her like scorpions. Yes!

Yes! The *voice* was right! He was a cancer with its foul tendrils probing and piercing her very heart—to batten on her life-blood . . . There was only *one* way, only *one* cure for a cancer—so the *voice* had said,—and the *voice* was right! Truly, there was but the *one* way to cut *this* cancerous, lecherous thing out of her life!

"There is only *one* way!" whispered the *voice*. The room echoed with the whispered, "only *one* way!"

Her fingers strayed over the revolver, feeling it with a delicate, caressing touch. How perfectly the handle fitted her hand! . . . It seemed made expressly for *her* . . . The surface, criss-crossed with fine grooves, had, before, offended her super-sensitive touch; now she understood the utility of the grooves, and felt grateful for the better grip they afforded the damp skin of her hand. . . . And the trigger . . . how well and cunningly placed! A slight pull . . . a trifling pressure . . . no more . . . his noxious existence would be ended! . . . she would again be able to breathe freely, without having her heart in her mouth every time she heard his voice . . . How absurdly simple it was . . . a slight pressure on the trigger and . . . she would be free! . . . . free from all his devilments, his insults . . . his sneering, thin-lipped smile . . . his threats! She would be free to live her life as she did before he came to darken it with his vileness; happy with her child and husband, free to come and go . . . And . . . it was easy . . . simple; no one would suspect her! Why should they suspect *her?* . . . There was no reason in the world why

anybody should think *she* was the guilty one . . . They would find his body, and in all probability blame one of the numerous tramps that passed along that road on their way to New York . . . Of course, they would never guess who did it; it would be a nine days wonder, and then forgotten like everything else. People were too busy worrying about their own affairs to trouble their heads with something which did not concern them.

She looked at the weapon and smiled, inwardly chiding herself for being so foolish to feel an antipathy against it, wondering why it had seemed so repellent.

The musical chimes of the clock in the parlor struck eleven.

"Eleven o'clock!" warned the *voice.* "He will be going any moment now. Will you go through the hell again tomorrow, and other tomorrows, or . . . ? It is either he or you. He . . . or your happiness. He . . . or . . . . *your child!*'

Gripping the revolver firmly in her hand, she turned to glance at her child, her eyes gleaming with the reddish glint of insanity. Holding the weapon out at arm's length, she noted in a peculiar, impersonal way that her hand was steady, and without a tremor in the muscles. A sense of peace and calm pervaded her whole being; and her disordered mind assured her that she would be doing a noble act by ridding the world of this incubus—this vile Benton. She was but the favored instrument used by *Justice* to cut his

career short, and so save *Womanhood* from his devilish machinations!

Opening her wardrobe, she took out a dark colored cloak and put it on, fastening it at her throat. Unbuttoning her waist, she carefully hid the revolver in her bosom; then, bending over the crib in which her child lay sleeping, she kissed him tenderly, whispering:

"For you! It is for *you*, Mumsie's thweetheart!"

She laughed insanely as she imitated the child's lisp.

"They shan't take *you* away from me!"

He moved uneasily in his sleep, and gave a little sigh.

Closing the door of the bedroom, she crept softly down the stairs; every step echoing the "For you, thweetheart!" which ran through her fevered brain. She silently opened the front door and peeped out.

Going noiselessly down the stoop, then on to the lawn, she gained the friendly shadows of the tall shrubbery leading to the gate.

Closing the gate quietly behind her, she walked quickly until she came to a large tree at the roadside, and whose overhanging branches threw a welcome darkness in which she could wait, unseen, for her enemy.

At the side of the house where he was walking slowly, Jack heard the moving of chairs in the study, informing him that Benton was about to leave for the city. He leaned against the corner, hidden by the shadow, and, a few minutes later, saw to his great relief the actor going down the stoop.

"You've got a lovely night for your walk," he heard his brother-in-law say. "Good luck!"

"Good night, Cogan," the actor replied with a wave of his gloves. "I'll be down tomorrow evening to finish up."

"You may, and . . . perhaps . . . you may not!" muttered Jack. "That all depends."

The actor strode down the path, while Cogan lingered on the porch, puffing at his cigar and enjoying the moonlit scene.

Jack waited impatiently. He heard the gate shut with a loud clang when Benton slammed it behind him.

"Durn you, Tom; I wish you'd go in"—he apostrophized the editor in a low grumbling voice. "I'll have to sprint to catch the cuss. I should have gone outside the gate to wait for him."

Cogan's mind was still on his play; for, with a sigh of pride, he turned and entered the house to look over his evening's work while he finished smoking his cigar.

Immediately the door was closed, Jack Waller dashed down the path in pursuit of the actor.

XIX

Mrs. Cogan's pulse quickened when she saw Benton coming!

As he stepped out of the shadows thrown by the trees at the edge of the road into the garish moonlight, she marked with keen satisfaction that her hand holding the revolver was about the right height, and all she had to do was press the trigger. In a quite impersonal way, she again noticed, too, that her hand was perfectly steady and under her control.

"It is very simple," said the *voice*. "A *child* could do it!"

The subtle reference to a "child" sent her thoughts back to her own child—her beloved boy. She set her lips tighter!

When he was almost abreast of her, she bent her head slightly to look along the barrel of the automatic resting against the trunk of the tree—to make sure of her aim. He swung out of the mottled shadow and into her field of vision; the sight on the end of the barrel showed dark against the white of his shirt-front.

The moment had come!

"Yes—now!" commanded the *voice* in answer to her unspoken question.

She was about to press the trigger, in accordance with the command of the impersonal entity which she imagined stood at her side, when a large touring automobile bounded past; loudly sounding a warning signal preparatory to turning the sharp corner a few yards away.

The unexpected and sudden raucous croak of the horn startled her, and she instinctively threw a swift glance over her shoulder. The next moment, the car had disappeared around the bend of the road, and Benton had passed her, and was some steps away.

Chagrined at the interruption and the loss of her opportunity, she stood, for a few seconds, dumbfounded and irresolute; then impulsively ran under the shadowing trees to overtake the actor, who, by this time, had crossed the road and disappeared round the bend.

She, also, cut across the road to shorten the intervening distance; her mind intent on the one thing she had set out to do.



Farther up the road, her brother was coming—running at an easy lope.

Suddenly, a shot rang out—down the road—ahead of him!

Recognizing the sound and startled by its suddenness, he stopped; then redoubled his speed, wondering what the sound foreboded.

Swinging round the sharp corner, he saw a sight that made him swerve abruptly to the side path, and hide in the shadow of a tree.

Not fifty feet away, in the middle of the white road, lay the body of a man; the dark form of a cloaked woman bending over him.

A vague fear gripped him! His body went cold, and his hands trembled. Something about the woman silhouetted against the whiteness of the road seemed strangely familiar. His breath came in short gasps! While he gazed, open-mouthed and stupified, the woman rose to her feet, and, throwing a quick glance down the road, started running toward him.

Running rapidly, she passed him as he crouched close to the tree to avoid being seen. He caught a glimpse of her white face as she flew past.

It was his sister, Kitty, with a small package in her hand!

A cold sweat beading his forehead, he stared at her retreating figure until she was lost in the deep shadows of the pathway; then ran quickly to the prostrate figure on the road.

It was Benton, with a bullet hole in his temple—dead!

He stooped beside the body, and pushed his hand into the inside pocket of the coat which was thrown open. It was empty! The package of letters was gone!

"Kitty! Kitty! Poor Kitty! May God forgive her!" he murmured huskily.

The glint of steel on the ground near the out-

stretched arm of the dead actor caught his eye. He picked up the automatic and recognized the initials—T. C.—cut in the handle. He shuddered when he saw that it was the same revolver he had given into her hand earlier in the evening.

"I must take care of it, otherwise—" His lips set hard at the thoughts of what might happen. He slipped the gun into his pocket.

"I should have kept it, and not put temptation her way by giving it to her," he accused himself bitterly. "My! . . . I didn't dream it was as bad as all that!" He looked down at the dead man's face, and shook his head regretfully. "You certainly must have been a rotter, to hound her into doing this!"

A large automobile coming from down the road was almost upon him before he heard the whirr of its motor. It did not enter his mind to run to the friendly shadows to try to conceal himself; indeed, he did not have the opportunity. He stood upright as the machine came to a stop near the body, and two men leaped out and ran to him.

"What has happened here? I am the Prosecuting Attorney of this County!" the speaker announced. Jack bowed slightly to him. His companion at that moment joined them. He was Mr. Warren, a business man of the town.

"Hullo, Mr. Waller," he cried, recognizing Jack, and shaking hands with him. "What's the trouble here?"

"Why . . uh . . . I was . . . walking down the road when I heard . . . a shot . . . I've only just ar-

rived, and I found the body just as you see it," he told the Prosecutor who was keenly observing him.

"Did you see anyone near here?" the official asked.

Jack hesitated, and shook his head. "No . . . nobody!"

He had paused for only the fraction of a second before giving his answer, but the quick ear of the Prosecutor detected it.

"Do you usually take walks without wearing your hat?"

The question surprised Waller. So intent had he been on watching for the actor, he had not noticed that his head had no covering; his life out in the open had been such that he had not felt the need. He put his hand to his head to confirm the Prosecutor's question. For the instant, he was thrown off his guard. The Attorney took advantage of it to "frisk" him—to slide his hands quickly over his pockets. Striking something hard in the right-hand pocket, he inserted his hand, and pulled out the automatic. Quickly running his finger over the magazine, he discovered that two bullets were missing. He held it up for Jack to see.

"Is this yours?" he asked grimly.

Jack immediately took in the situation. *The damninng evidence of the revolver was against him!* He was silent.

"Sorry, Mr. Waller, if that's your name," the officer said curtly; "but I have to place you under arrest."

"Why—" Jack blurted, taken by surprise; then—the thought of his sister's danger flashing into his mind—he drew himself up stiffly. "All right, sir," he replied in a tense voice; "but I am innocent!"

"What's that? You . . . you are arresting Mr. Waller?" inquired Waren, who with the chauffeur had been examining the dead body. "Oh! . . . why, Clark, that's . . . that's absurd . . . to suspect *him!*"

"I have just found the gun on him, Mr. Warren," was the cold reply.

Warren stared in amazement at Jack's set face. "My God! Waller! Is that true?"

Words of denial came welling up to Jack's lips, but, with an effort, he restrained himself and spoke to Clark, the Prosecutor.

"May I help to put the body in the car? You'll want to take it with you, I suppose."

The official looked keenly at him, trying to guess the reason for the proffered aid.

"He is rather heavy for these two," he explained, indicating the youthful chauffeur and the not very athletic looking Mr. Warren; "for, of course, you will want to keep an eye on *me,*" with a tinge of sarcasm in his voice.

"Very well," came the curt reply.

Between them, they lifted Benton's body onto the rear seat of the car.

"Now sit alongside the driver, Mr. Waller," commanded the Prosecutor; "and please remember I've got the drop on you."

Jack gave a little nod and took his place on the

front seat. The others got in the car, and soon they were speeding toward the local Police Station, each occupied with their own thoughts.

Hidden by the shadows, Mrs. Cogan crept silently into the house. The light coming from the window of the study indicated that her husband was still there and working on his play, so she had no fear of meeting him. Cautiously tip-toeing up the stairs, avoiding as if by instinct the places which would give out a tell-tale creak, she noiselessly made her way to her bedroom.

Pushing the precious package of letters under the mattress of her bed, she hurriedly pulled off her cloak, and hung it in its place in the wardrobe. Feeling in the bosom of her waist for the revolver, and not finding it there, she tried to recollect what she had done with it, but without success.

Perplexed, she endeavored to pierce the blank that surrounded her memory, and tried to remember her actions after she had opened *his* coat, and taken the letters out of the pocket. She remembered that! The recollection of her running until the gate loomed up in front of her came back in a dim, hazy way. But what had become of the gun . . . she could not recall. It did not trouble her very much, for—she had the letters! And that was the main thing. With a scorn-

ful pout, as though the matter was of little importance, she dismissed it from her mind, for . . . at last she was safe! No more of that hell for her; that was certain at all events. She could breathe *now* without having her heart jump into her mouth every time *he* came into her mind.

As the thoughts of her freedom raced gladly through her brain, she undid her waist and skirt, took them off, and threw them over the back of a chair. The thought of the letters being in her possession crowded everything else out of her mind. She wondered if she dared risk reading them now, and then, after reading them, destroy them; or had she better wait until her husband retired for the night.

"Yes, perhaps that is best. I'll wait!" she finally concluded. "Seeing the light here, he may come in to see why I wasn't asleep."

She put her dressing gown on, and, after pulling down the shades, turned on the electric light near her dressing table.

A muffled sigh from the crib drew her attention to the child sleeping peacefully; its little arm resting on the pillow, the chubby pink fingers hidden in the golden curls. A wave of intense mother-love swept through her. "It's all right, sweetheart," she cooed softly to her loved one on the bed. "It's done, and now we are safe, darling!" She smiled contentedly as she sat down near the light and reached for a magazine on the small table by the window. 'If he comes in'—she thought, meaning her husband—'I can pretend to be reading; then when he falls asleep I

. . .” She did not finish the sentence. Her ear caught the ringing of the telephone bell downstairs.

“Who can that be . . . at this time of night?” she muttered, slightly annoyed at the sound interrupting her thoughts.

Through the closed door of her room came, faintly, the big tones of her husband’s voice answering the call; then, ages after—so it seemed to her, for her thoughts were centred on the spot under the large pink blossom on the coverlet—she heard him rushing up the stairs.

“Kitty!” he cried, throwing the door open, “something terrible has happened! Benton—Benton is dead!”

“Is he?” she asked in a tone of indifference, looking up from her magazine.

“Yes!” he gasped, wiping the sweat off his forehead. “He was found . . . on the road . . . murdered!”

“Murdered?” she asked, with an air of being bored by information that did not interest her.

“Yes! Murdered!” he repeated. “And . . . oh, my God! Jack has been arrested!”

“What!” she exclaimed, suddenly shocked into life. “Jack? Arrested?” She sprang to her feet, letting the magazine fall to the floor.

Cogan leaned weakly against the door-frame and nodded, “Yes.”

“For what?” she demanded, wonderingly.

“They found him there . . . with my gun in his pocket . . . and . . . they took him to the station house,” he stammered. “Good God! why did he do it?”

He bowed his head, and closed his eyes, trying to steady himself.

Her mind went back to the scene on the road. 'They found the gun in his pocket! How did it get there? I must have dropped it somewhere. But how did he happen to find it?' The questions, speeding through her mind, puzzled her. Occupied with her thoughts, she gazed blankly at her husband.

"Get your clothes on, Kitty," he said huskily, raising his head. "We'll go down to the station. They are sending a machine for us."

Slowly, he turned and went down the stairs. The shock had unnerved him, and he shook like a leaf. He had noticed that his wife had heard the dreadful news with a calmness that was unlike her usual manner, but he put it down to her being numbed by the abruptness of the announcement.

Opening the front door, he went out on the porch to wait for her. Soon, she came down fully dressed, and as she shut the door behind her, the gate swung open with a clang, and Mr. Warren came up the garden path.

Cogan ran down the steps to meet him; on his tongue the question: "Warren, what is this dreadful thing that's happened?"

"I am awfully sorry, Cogan, but it looks damned bad for your brother-in-law! I'll tell you all about it in the car," he added, catching sight of Mrs. Cogan coming down the stoop.

XX.

If, when bending over the "dead" body of Benton, searching for the package of letters, Mrs. Cogan had been endowed with the clairvoyant faculty, she would have witnessed one of life's greatest mysteries; the release of a soul—*the soul of Benton.*

A soul who—to a seer with clairvoyant vision—was a whirling mass of vapor-like currents of a muddy, reddish hue mixed with strata of grayish-green; the whole being slashed through and through with vivid flashes of a vibrant, crimsoned scarlet. The wraith-like shape rose out of the body lying inert on the ground, and as it hovered a few feet above the corpse, gradually grew more dense, and took on the form of a human figure; a tenuous facsimile, even to the clothes, of the man who only a few instants before had been walking down the road.

It was Benton! The *real* Benton, more alive now than when he occupied his physical body, for he was freed from the heavy encumbrance of bones and flesh he had been so proud of, and to which he had devoted so much of his time; feeding, bathing, and adorning it with jewels and fine clothing for the admiration and envy of his fellow-humans.

As is usual in most cases of sudden death (from which—as the Prayer Book hath it—"May the good Lord deliver us!"), and when the soul is suddenly hurled out of its body, Benton was dazed and bewildered. He had felt some kind of a shock which, although it had been a painless one, left him stunned and benumbed. He felt as he remembered feeling at the end of a minor operation he had undergone in a hospital, when he was recovering from the influence of the ether he had inhaled. Everything around him was undefined and out of focus, and, apparently, in motion; the road and landscape appearing like a dissolving view thrown on billowy masses of smoke.

"Why . . . what the devil . . . is the matter?" he muttered. "My head feels . . . queer! Like a combination of a . . . rotten bilious attack or sea-sickness . . Gad! Whew! . . . I'm . . . so . . . dizzy—"

Shaking his head, and blinking his eyes in the endeavor to clear his sense of vision, he saw a soft, brilliant *radiance* shining at his side. He turned to look at the phenomenon. It was an oval shape of exquisite, white brilliance, from which emanated the tremulous "radiance"—bits of many-hued tints; a glory of living light; an aura of palpitating loveliness, resplendent with diaphanous effulgence. A *Voice*, soft and golden, which seemed to fill the whole Universe with its volume, came from the *Presence* within the radiance.

"You wish to know what has happened?"

Benton strained his powers of vision to the utmost,

endeavoring to pierce the shimmering resplendence, to see from whence the *Voice* came.

"Who or what are you?" he asked, hardly believing his senses.

"I am a Helper," announced the *Voice*. "I come to those who need help."

Benton shaded his eyes with his hands, trying to discover the meaning of the Vision; but his dulled sight was unequal to the task.

"Something has happened; but damned if I know what? Perhaps you can tell me."

"Yes! Something has happened; something of very great importance to you. You are what the dwellers on the planet of sorrow—Earth—call . . . dead!"

"Faugh!" exploded the actor in a tone of disdain.

"You have been suddenly thrust out of your body . . killed!"

He gave a short laugh of scorn. "Don't be a damn fool! If that's all you can tell me—"

"Try to remember," the *Voice* advised him gently.

A glimmer of a vague memory like the detached and blurred fragments of a dream seeped up to the surface of his consciousness. Slowly, he raised his hand to his temple, and touched the bullet-hole; it was wet and sticky! Astonished, he looked at his fingers. They were smeared with clotted blood! Amazed—for his thought-processes were still benumbed—he glanced at his clothes. There were his evening suit, his overcoat, his immaculate patent-leather shoes, his diamond

rings! An expression of disgust at being—as he thought—fooled so easily spread over his face.

"You do not believe that you have passed the portals of Death."

"Oh, hell! You must think I am a damn fool," he snorted. "Do dead men wear clothes?" he demanded scornfully.

"Yes, strange though it may seem to you, they do!"

"And I am dead, am I?" inquired the actor, in a tone of sarcasm.

"Come with me, and prove it for yourself," said the Helper, pityingly.

Benton gave a gesture of annoyance. "Oh, be off with you; I am not an idiot!" he muttered testily. "Better attend to your own affairs—if you have any."

The radiance faded away. It was no longer visible!

Cursing himself for being so foolish as to admit the possibility of the Vision being a reality, Benton forced all his will-power to bear on his numbed sense of sight, and to clear away the film which seemed to cloud his eyes. He had to catch the last train, or . . . "but where the devil is the road?" he muttered angrily, concentrating his attention on the vague, gray mistiness surrounding him. His foot felt for the hard road which had been there only a few minutes ago.

His foot met with no resistance!

"Why . . . what the devil has become of it? And . . . what is this stuff under foot? . . . It feels like . ."

He was at a loss for a simile. So far as he could make out, he was in a thick, fog-like atmosphere which appeared to be more like a viscuous fluid than air.

He couldn't be blind—he argued, for, even if the road was invisible, he could see the fog—even if not very clearly; but . . . he was helpless. The wall of fog which enveloped him seemed impenetrable! He dared not move to the left or to the right; to go forward or backward.

"Well . . . I seem to be stuck here. Perhaps I should have gone with him, whoever he was," he muttered. Then, as he recalled the vision of the One who called Himself a "Helper" he wondered who He could be.

"Hell! It's only a figment of the imagination. I must be seeing things!"

The fog seemed to close in on him; and, as it palpitated past him with a sinuous motion, now and again touched him. The contact almost paralyzed him!

It was clammy, slimy, and cold!

Dimly he saw the mass wind in and out with a weird, snake-like writhe. He watched the undulating movement—fascinated.

The gray fog lay, apparently, in strata which whirled in and out of each other as they revolved around him in a vertiginous pulsation, and with an exasperating unctuousness. His eyes gradually focussing on the slimy wall of gray, he observed that patches scaled off the mass, leaving lighter toned spots of a livid hue. The surfaces of the spots swelled out—bubble-shaped, then burst, exposing a ferment of pestilent feculence.

Spellbound, Benton felt himself being drawn by

some strange attractive power toward the abominable foulness which now emitted a horrible, putrid stench of an indescribable odor that made him gasp. Struggling frantically to keep from being engulfed in the gaping vortex of filth, he saw that he was being drawn inexorably into the obscene maw; or . . . God in heaven! . . . *was it coming closer to him?*

He was palsied with terror when his horrible situation broke in on his dulled senses; when he realized that the undulating gray mass of suppuration was nearer to him, almost touching him on all sides, and that the whole fog was a revolving mass of livid putridity!

An unspoken cry for help came from his parted lips.

The grayness disappeared, and the soft, mellow Radiance once more shone around him.

"You called. I have come. Will you accompany me now?" asked the *Voice*.

The golden tones soothed Benton with a healing calm.

"Yes! Yes!" he almost shrieked. "Anything but . . . this!"

To the distracted actor it seemed as if an arm of Power upheld and guarded him as he floated by the side of the Helper in a halo of shimmering light.

XXI

During the journey in the car from Cogan's house to the Police Station, Mr. Warren told what he knew of the finding of the actor's body.

"I met Clark a little this side of Arnold's place," he told Cogan. Turning to Mrs. Cogan sitting on the front seat with her handkerchief to her mouth, "Clark is the new Prosecuting Attorney,"—he explained. "I stopped to say 'howdy' to him. We were talking . . . oh . . . perhaps five minutes or so, when we heard a noise like a rifle or pistol shot. 'That sounds like a gun,' said Clark, and he turned to his chauffeur and asked him if he had heard it. He said 'yes, sounded up the road somewheres.' 'I'd better investigate,' said Clark to me; 'want to come along'? I thought perhaps someone was having trouble with tramps, so I jumped in his car, and the driver speeded her up for all she was worth."

Mrs. Cogan leaned back against the cushion, and closed her eyes.

"When we came round the bend,—you know that sharp turn below your place," . . . Cogan nodded in answer . . . "well, we nearly run into two men; one of them was lying on the road, and the other one was

bending over him. The driver—the chap that's driving us now—stopped the car just in the nick of time, —if he hadn't, we'd have run over them,—and just as we came to a standstill, your brother-in-law stood up. He was the one which was bending over the other one. Clark was nearest and jumped out first; then I got out and saw who it was—Waller, I mean."

Mrs. Cogan's eyes opened slightly. She was listening intently.

"I shook hands with Waller, and stooped over to see who the man on the ground was. The chauffeur was ahead of me, and as I got to the body he said to Clark: 'The man's dead, sir. Got a bullet-hole in his temple.' "

Cogan drew a deep breath. "What did Ja . . er . . my brother-in-law say? Did he say anything?"

"I didn't hear all he said because I was examining the man to see if he was dead or only wounded," Warren replied. "When I asked him what had happened, he shut up like a clam. Then Clark told him he was under arrest. It knocked me all of a heap!"

"But didn't he say anything?" Cogan persisted anxiously.

"Oh, yes! When Clark found the gun in his pocket, he said he was innocent," replied Warren; "and when we got down to the station house, he told us the man's name was Benton—I think that's the name—and that we'd better phone to you."

Cogan stared blankly in front of him, not knowing what to say. What *could* he say or think? Everything was plain enough! The gun—his gun which he

had given him earlier in the evening to fire at the yowling cats—was found in his pocket; and he recalled with a sad heart, the evening of the actor's first visit, when Jack had said he would as soon put a bullet in his hide as talk to him! And now, he *had* put a bullet in him! Jack's experiences at the "front" must have made him callous and coldblooded. He had seen so many killed that evidently he held human life very cheap. Cogan's spirit was crushed! Why hadn't he been successful in getting them to shake hands, and to forget that trifling misunderstanding on board ship? It would have avoided all this trouble. Benton was gentleman enough to be willing to meet him half way, but . . . well, there must be something radically wrong with Jack; something lacking and unknown in his character to . . . to commit such a shocking crime!

Cogan glanced at his wife from under his eyebrows. She was motionless but for the swaying of the automobile, huddled in the corner of the seat, hiding her face in her handkerchief. 'Poor Kitty! Poor girl!' —he thought. 'She will never get over it!'

The car came to a stop in front of the Police Station.

"Well . . . here we are," said Warren.

They went up the steps, and entered the Station; the chauffeur following a few feet behind.

Jack was sitting on a bench against the wall; his arms folded, his eyes staring at the floor. He stood up when the party entered. Mrs. Cogan rushed past

her husband and threw her arms around her brother's neck; tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Oh, Jack! Jack!" she wailed, brokenly.

He smiled wanly, and caressed her hair. "Keep silent, Kitty!" he whispered under cover of her embrace. "*For the sake of your child, don't say anything!* Do you understand? This is a very serious business; so say *absolutely nothing*. Remember now!" he commanded sternly.

Clark, the Prosecuting Attorney, had beckoned to Cogan when he came in, and had taken him to where the Police Captain on duty for the night was sitting.

"Look at that, carefully, Mr. Cogan," he said, giving him the revolver.

The editor took the automatic and glanced at the stock; he saw his own initials. His face suddenly paled as he recognized the familiar marks.

"There's no need of asking; I can see it belongs to you," said Clark, with a definite nod.

The editor looked sorrowfully at him, and returned the weapon. "I see no reason why I should deny it," he gulped. "It's mine."

The Prosecutor grasped his arm. "You and your wife have my sincere sympathy. I wish it had not happened here; but . . . you understand, I have to do my duty."

The editor nodded dejectedly; then walked over to where his brother-in-law was standing. Reaching over his wife's shaking figure, he put his hands on Jack's shoulders, and looked at him questioningly. As if she

knew it was her husband who stood behind her, Mrs. Cogan tightened her embrace, and buried her face on her brother's breast.

Jack looked at Cogan as though his thoughts were far away,—as indeed they were.

The room had, for the moment, been blotted out, and, in its place, unfolded the vision of that ancient time when he and his brother were in the trench, his brother sorely wounded lying on the ground, his life-blood staining the wet earth; while he, whom his brother had rescued, stood watching him with tearful eyes. Now he understood the full meaning of the vision, and guessed that the reason it had been shown him, when in the trench in France, was to prepare his mind for the payment of that ancient debt when the payment was required of him. And . . . the time for that payment had come! The vision faded, and in its place were Cogan's questioning eyes.

Jack gave no sign; but a light of resolve shone in his eyes.

"Do you want to say anything, Jack?" Cogan asked, brokenly. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Not now, Tom; not tonight," he replied. "Tomorrow, if you can spare a few minutes to come and see me."

"All right, old man," said Cogan, having hard work to keep his tears back.

Jack motioned, asking him to take Mrs. Cogan away.

"Come, girlie," Cogan said with a sigh. He touched

her on the shoulder; she clung closer to her brother. The Captain and the Prosecutor came to the little group.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Cogan," Clark said gently; "but we have to do our duty, you know."

Her brother grasped her arms, and coaxed her to loosen her hands. "Come, sis," he said persuasively, patting her on her shoulders, "you mustn't take it so hard."

A torrent of tears coursed down her cheeks, and her bosom heaved spasmodically as she moaned: "Oh, Jack! Jack! What will come of all this?"

Holding her face between his hands so that he could look into her eyes, he whispered, "Don't worry about me; I have been in the Valley of Death before!" He kissed her forehead. "It will come out all right, old girl," he added in a louder tone.

He pushed her gently into her husband's arms, and turned to the officers. "I am ready, gentlemen."

The two policemen standing near, stepped up to him.

"Good night, Tom. Good night, sis," he called over his shoulder as he went through the doorway—a prisoner.

"Good night, Jack," replied Cogan. "I'll see you in the morning." His sister, the tears coursing down her cheeks, waved her hand dumbly. She sank heavily onto the bench, and bowed her head on the rail at the back; thinking her own thoughts while her husband listened to Clark's account of the affair.

Unseen by those in the room, two other visitors appeared on the scene,—the Helper and the actor.

Benton, by virtue of the help given him by the One at his side, saw with clear vision the group near the Captain's desk; and recognizing Cogan, rushed up to him with a glad cry of relief, overjoyed to see the familiar face, and to find that he had awakened from what he imagined was a dream or hallucination, and had come back to his normal life again.

"Gad! but I am glad to see you again, old fellow!" he cried. "Do you know, I have had the queerest, rottenest experience I ever went through! After I left your house, on my way to the train, suddenly everything got confused, just as if—"

He stopped short and stared at the editor who, paying no attention to him, was listening intently to Clark's recital.

"Say, Cogan," he said peevishly, trying to shake the editor's shoulder, "what is the matter? Cannot you listen to me for a moment?" He raised his voice querulously.

Receiving no answer, he went to the front of Cogan and looked at his face.

"You aren't asleep, I can see that!" he snapped.

He touched the editor's cheek to attract his attention. His hand passed through Cogan's face in a

most inexplicable manner; and, trying to gain his notice by striking his face and body lightly, he saw in amazement that his efforts had no effect. Wondering if he was going insane, he addressed himself to the Prosecutor.

"Pardon me a moment, won't you? I want to ask you a question. Are you really there—talking, or am I dreaming?"

Clark of course—not being clairvoyant—did not see him, so took no notice of him but went on with his narrative to Cogan.

Benton was astounded, and not knowing what to make of it, slowly turned his head. He caught sight of Mrs. Cogan huddled at the end of the bench. Apparently through no effort of his own, he now stood beside her.

"Forgive me for troubling you, but *you* will tell me, I feel sure," he said in his most urbane manner; "if only for the sake of old times. Are you sitting there, or am I dreaming?"

With her Irish, psychic temperament, and her nerves strained to a high pitch of tension, Mrs. Cogan was more than ordinarily sensitive. She felt a cold wave envelope her; and as though she sensed something inimical to her, she shivered.

"My goodness," she thought; "somebody's creeping over my grave!"

She sat up and glanced at her husband who had risen from his chair. Clark had told him all he knew of the murder, and there was nothing more that could be done for the present. Now, the best thing they

could do was to return sorrowfully to their home, and await the coming of the morrow.

"Come, Kitty," called Cogan, his voice heavy with sorrow; "let us go. We cannot do anything more tonight."

Benton, exasperated at being ignored, stood in front of her and tried to forcibly detain her; but she walked through him as if he were non-existent. She shivered with a cold chill down her spine as she passed him. The actor shouted at them wrathfully when he saw they took no notice of him.

"What's come over you people? Can't you hear me? God knows I am yelling loud enough!"

He found himself in the centre of the group. The Prosecutor was shaking hands with Cogan, and giving him advice regarding the law. Benton in a passion dashed his fist down on their clasped hands.

"Damn it!" he yelled. "I'll make you listen to me!"

Their hands passed through his fist as a solid goes through vapor!

He stared at them, amazed, as they went slowly to the door and passed out into the night.

Stricken with a nameless fear, he shook with terror at the thought that perhaps, after all, the Helper's assertion was true. That he had—astounding though the idea might be—passed from the earth-world into the great Beyond with all its unfathomed mysteries; mysteries unknown to him, which filled him with apprehension for what the future held for him.

The radiance shone at his side.

Benton glared at the white Brilliance, dumbfounded!

XXII.

One of the perplexing problems of those whose work —and privilege—is to welcome the (so-called) dead into the next sphere of activity have to contend with, is the unbelief of the newcomers.

They who have perhaps spent days, weeks, or even months on a sick-bed of suffering, and now finding themselves free from pain, will not, as a rule, believe that they have crossed the "borderland," and imagine that they have regained their physical health and vigor.

Those who are charged with this work, ofttimes have to display a great deal of ingenuity in devising methods with which they can convince the new arrival that he—or she—has really passed from the earth-world into the next.

The average person who accepts the teaching of a future life has an idea that he will go to a place of which he has only the vaguest conception; a heaven made up of gold, diamonds, rubies, pearls, sapphires, and other precious stones; beings wearing nightshirts and with birds' wings growing on their shoulder-blades, blowing golden trumpets to swell the chorus of the "saved" who, sitting on clouds, are playing

harps and singing "Allelulia" during a continuous day (there is no night) which lasts for all eternity. Such a naive idea comes, possibly, from taking literally the attempts of mystics to describe the indescribable with physical plane language, and by using physical plane imagery; but those who have had their consciousness raised to the point where they can cognize the "heaven-world," know that all efforts to picture to others—not so fortunate as themselves—the glory and beauty of the heaven-world must necessarily result in failure; for its transcendent grandeur cannot be imaged —cannot be even suggested by means of physical plane language, however expressive.

Benton having thought this world the only one, had no ideas of any sort regarding a future life. When he had heard references to the possibility of another life after death, he had either refused to consider them, or had dismissed them with a cynical, "I should worry!" Now, when the awful possibility of the Helper's words being true grew clearer in his consciousness, he was utterly bewildered.

During the interval which elapsed between leaving the scene of his passing out and coming to the Police Station, Benton's mind had been purposely stimulated by the Helper so that he could remember what had taken place immediately prior to the killing of his physical body. He had remembered, but feeling himself as vigorous as he had ever been, imagined it was some kind of a hallucination—a fantasy. Now as the hideous truth dawned in on him that he had been deprived of all he desired—physical life and all that

it meant to him—wealth, ambition, fame, adulation, the joys of the animal body with its lusts and pleasures,—he yelled and shrieked and stamped in tumultuous and passionate rage.

No more would he enjoy the sybaritic delights of the table with its highly seasoned viands, its luscious fruits, its rare and mellow wines.

Never again for him the intoxicating, perfume-laden atmosphere of society drawing-rooms with softly colored lights, the dim subtle shadows inviting to languorous téte-a-têtes with lovely women whose toilettes were merely an excuse for revealing rather than for concealing their seductive charms; the *svelte* figures, the white skins, the rosebud fingers, the carmined lips, the elegant coiffures, the priceless jewels enhancing and drawing attention to the delicately curved bosoms beneath. The dark eyes full of passion and allure, ambushed under drooping lashes. simulating a modesty they had long since ceased to feel, holding in their turbid depths promises of amorous delights; they, too, would never more weave their voluptuous snares for him. No more illicit meetings with loose-moraled wives of trusting husbands; no more scented *billets-doux* and Don Juan adventures. No more for him the unholy orgies with maidens of tender innocence, cajoled and tempted, drugged, then ruined; no more the lascivious revels of nameless degeneracy.

No more would the plaudits of the crowd fall gratefully on his ears. He, the clever, resourceful comedian, the *debonnaire* man of society, the idol of women, the envied of his fellow-actors; he, whose

name in flashing electrics on a theatre was alone sufficient to fill the house with an admiring audience for weeks at a stretch; whose exploits provided grist for the mills of the jaded newspaper hacks; whose opinions on the high educative value of the stage as a means for the betterment of mankind were quoted by clergymen in their Sunday pulpits—he had been torn away from all that had made life worth the living.

All, all was gone!

All that to him was "LIFE;" for life to him meant his own selfish pleasures of the flesh; and now that he had been deprived of his physical body through and by which he had experienced those dissipations, he was bereft of the means of obtaining and continuing those enjoyments.

Stripped of everything he desired, he was poor indeed!

His wealth, for all the good it might do him, was dross!

His fame, being merely other persons' opinions of his abilities, was to him worthless!

His friends, of which he had many—of his own type, sybarites and degenerates,—were unable to help him; they, like himself, thought but little of the world to come, and———cared less. They sowed in the wind, little recking of the reaping in the whirlwind. Most of them, like himself, did not believe in a hereafter. "One world at a time!" was their motto, as also had

been his. Things that were sacred and holy to others were to them, as also they had been to him—subjects to excite their ridicule and cynical ribaldry. They might be all very well for young children, and for old decrepit men and women who stood in need of gland or similar operations; but for men!—virile—such as he!——

The *Voice* in the Radiance spoke to him.

"Are you convinced?"

Benton looked at his Interrogator, perplexed. His consciousness, which had been stimulated by the Helper for the purpose of enabling him to see the physical world clearly, now that the power was being withdrawn, began to adjust itself to the more ethereal substance of the world of disembodied souls. The room with its furniture lost its look of reality, and, through the hazy atmosphere which softened and blended its harsh solidity, looked like an out-of-focus duplicate of the physical room—a dream picture.

"I don't know what to believe," he retorted sullenly. "If this is the heaven that the priests and parsons prate about, it isn't what it's cracked up to be; and if it is hell, pouf! it isn't as bad as they say it is!" He smiled in his crass conceit to think that his gift of witty repartee had not deserted him; and that his humorous sally would have vastly amused his flippant intimates.

The Helper gazed severely at him. "You are not in heaven. . . ."

"I should hope not; for I expect something better

than this," he interrupted with a flash of his old insolent manner.

"Nor in hell," continued the *Voice*. "Perhaps . . . your hell. . . ." the *Voice* paused, significantly . . . "is to come!"

The actor laughed scornfully. He had either forgotten his experience in the gray foggy maelstrom, or fancied that it must have been a delusion.

"There is yet one other whom you should see. Come with me!"

Benton for the moment hesitated, a callous quip on the tip of his tongue, but there was a tone of command in the *Voice* which he, for all his levity, felt obliged to obey.

The haziness gave place to a police cell in which, sitting on a cot, was Jack Waller.

Following the rules of the prison, he was without coat, collar or necktie. Bent forward, his chin resting on his hand, he was pondering over his predicament. Suddenly, he was conscious of a strange power like a wave of electric force thrill through him; he straightened up, wondering what was the cause. His psychic senses were sensitive enough to glimpse the glow of the unearthly light of the Radiance—the Light of a higher sphere, and he felt uplifted as he inwardly murmured a prayer: "Protect *her*, O Lord, from evil, and . . . give *me* strength until the end!"

Benton recognized him!

His thin lips parted, baring his teeth in a fiendish snarl of hatred. His fingers crooked themselves like the talons of a cruel bird of prey. He sprang for-

ward in an insane attempt to grasp his throat with his claws to throttle him, but his intention was frustrated by the wall of light surrounding Waller, which the actor now noticed for the first time. In his anger, he dashed at Jack in an endeavor to break through the aura of light, only to be hurled back, grinding his teeth in impotency. Finding all his efforts at revenge useless, he vented on Jack all the coarse epithets his obscene mind could remember.

In his, literally, blind madness, he did not notice the changes taking place around him.

The Radiance had gone!

In his ignorance and self-conceit, Benton was unaware that the presence of the Helper had been as a guardian wall set up between him and forces inimical to him, and that the beneficent Power had shielded him from things which were attracted to him by the force of his own affinity to them; which were, in fact, *the results of his own lascivious and degenerate thoughts*—known to the occultist by the name "thought-forms." Verily, "*Thoughts are things!*"

His vituperation subsided when he felt a slimy "something" fasten on his cheek with a constricting, clammy movement.

Clutching at the *thing*, his fingers sank into the yielding substance as he tried to dislodge it. As he

tore it away from his face, pieces of his flesh seemed to adhere to it. Holding it in his hand to see what it was, a quiver of abhorrence ran through him. The monstrosity had no definite form! It was protean in its changes. Even while he stared at it, the *thing* changed its shape . . . in his grasp! Oddly shaped and vari-colored splotches of putridity—coming from, apparently, nowhere in particular—floated onto the mass of slime in his fingers and coalesced with it, altering its form and color. The *thing* itself seemed to be instinct with some kind of life, for it turned itself inside out . . . piecemeal! At one instant it was a sickly green with magenta-colored excrescences dotted with saffron spots which now spread out in large splotches, then abruptly disappeared beneath the surface of the slime; the next moment, the abomination was a closely packed horde of pale red eyes, set in a yellowish, pale green through which ran streaks of putrefaction with a wavy, wobbling motion.

Gazing in fascinated horror he saw that the *thing* was protruding itself between his fingers, and enwrapping its foulness around his wrist and arm. He opened his fingers convulsively, and tried to shake it off. It broke into formless clots which floated aimlessly away for a short distance, then, as if by an instinct of their own, coalesced, forming new and horrible combinations, which in turn were drawn to him as by some attractive power.

The breaking up of the glutinous mass of putrescence was accompanied by a bursting forth of a hor-

rible stench;—the essence of putridity!

Benton reeled from the foul odors in disgust; for he *felt* as well as smelled them.

Now he awoke to the fact that he was again within the moving strata of gray fog, which formed a shell around him.

It was a churning, sinuous tomb of living corruption!

No longer was it merely fog! Every part of it was a bubbling, palpitating shape of malignity! Now separate, now joined together to form a grotesque and hideous unnameable *thing!* But whether in separate flecks of rotten spume, or in coalesced misshapen lumps of indescribable aspect, they all floated toward Benton as though drawn by a magnet.

His eyes bulging with terror, his lips drawn back in fear—like an animal at bay, he struck out wildly at the *things* that clung to him, sucking out his life-force.

His efforts were of no avail! No sooner had he torn off one abominable *thing* than he was assailed by others. On all sides, blotches of corruption *leered* and fastened on him—feeding on his flesh! Transparent, livid-colored, creeping things wormed into his nostrils and ears. Foul, eel-like *things* trailed over his eyes, and forced their slimy way between his lips.

Insane with horror, he observed that his flesh—which clung to the *things* when he tore them away—in some unexplainable fashion *renewed itself, and formed new material for other blotches to fasten and feed upon!*

He laughed hysterically as the myth of "Prometheus Chained" flashed into his demented brain, and his madness took the form of likening himself to Prometheus chained to the rock with the vultures feeding on his liver, which constantly renewed itself for the next feast!

Tearing a living lump of slime from his face, he watched with growing horror the creatures battening on his hand and arm.

He screeched out shocking oaths against the one responsible for the killing of his physical body; hurling epithets garnered in low bagnios and dens of nameless infamy, and expressed in the grossest terms of three languages.

The shell of abominable *things* broke into larger and more menacing shapes!

These new *things* were such as to baffle description! It would be impossible for any sane mind, even in the wildest and most extravagant fancy, to conceive such absurd malformations.

It was a riot of indecent grotesquerie!

The *things* looked as if some insane fiend had ransacked the animal, bird and insect kingdoms for strange and repellent forms, and, having dismembered them, had reconstructed and recombined them into unexpected and unthought-of aberrations.

Huge elephantine legs with snake-like appendages for toes were surmounted with, and joined together by a ridiculously small body covered with hard scales through whose interstices exuded whip-like feelers ending in an eye, the pupil formed of a protruding claw.

Loathsome toad-like forms having on their backs an eye which had a revolving skin with slits, giving it a weird effect of blinking. Vulture-like talons covered with globules moving incessantly. On the body of a lizard-shaped beast that was upside down and moved sideways in an erratic manner, grew limbs belonging to animals and birds of prey, which were, apparently, stuck on haphazard and at odd angles to the body.

Disgusting creatures of aberrant shapes crept and squirmed their sluggish way over Benton's body, burrowing into his flesh. Trying to dislodge some of his tormentors, he was amazed to find that *he was naked!* He discovered, to his astonishment, *that his whole body was, seemingly, made up of masses and combinations of these things;* these foul creatures of rottenness. That his body was the breeding place of all this festering vermin; and that however much he tried to rid himself of them, his efforts were useless; for he merely tore away the upper layers, disclosing deeper and yet deeper layers of purulent foulness.

The surrounding "shell" of corruption seemed to be connected with his body; not only being part and parcel of it, but exuding from his own being.

An efflorescence of putrefaction!

* * * * * * * * *

Harassed and tormented, almost lifeless from the tremendous pressure of *unseen presences* around him;

stonily cold as though he were embedded in a tomb of ice, he caught faint sounds of music.

The gray mistiness began to be tinged with a shimmering, pinkish translucency.

Scarlet notes cadenced through the thick murk like stray beams of the rising sun lighting up the breaks in an overcast sky at dawn. The sounds carolled and echoed in the distance, and awakened other sounds of differing *timbre*, colors, potencies, which with their overtones wove their nuances and subleties into a warp and woof of a cacophonic delirium.

Far off—in the distance—a new dawn was being ushered in!

Faintly at first, then growing louder and ever louder, the eerie orchestra seemed to be approaching. The feverish tones rose and fell in irregular pulsations and rhythms; at one time sweetly soothing like the cooing of love-birds at their mating, then emerging as a chaunt—a pæan to strange gods sung in unison by golden throats; now dying away to a seductive murmuring faint with satiety, then gladsome with the joyous laughter of woodland sprites; now light and airy as filaments of gossamer floating on the summer breeze, now scintillating hysterically like the reflections of stars dancing on a rippled sea.

Fantastically shaped butterflies of bizarre hues dreamily floated by. Scarlet birds, their plumage iridescent with vari-colored light, flitted about him in long, sinuous curves which left paths of a metallic blue in the magenta-colored light; winging their way between the orange and pale green blossoms spring-

ing up all around him, which—as if they had sentient life—leaned towards him in smiling witchery.

The dense gray, slimy, ice-cold fog had disappeared, and in its place was a vibrating, magenta-colored atmosphere whose every atom seemed electrified with a feverish life, enwrapping him in a semi-pellucid opalescence.

Throbbing ever nearer and nearer, the music swelled in intensity and volume; and, suddenly, as if great doors were opened, it crashed forth, full voiced, in a crimsoned magnificence; rioting over the world with the reckless abandon of an obscene saturnalia.

All was ablaze with light!

Forms which had been vague shapes of color, were now resolved into forms of dainty young maidens of surpassing loveliness; their supple nude bodies adorned with garlands of strangely-formed flowers, hued with colors the like he had never seen before.

As they approached, singing and dancing as they came, Benton saw that they were accompanied by fauns, satyrs, centaurs, and other semi-human and semi-bird entities playing on curiously-shaped instruments.

The pressure of the powerful *unseen presences* that had weighed him down had ceased, and now he was aware of a feeling of lightness; the palpitating air around seemed to permeate his whole being, and fill him with a new and exuberant life.

The extraordinary pageant, bathed in an unearthly glow of pale magenta, was apparently endless; for it

extended and merged into the blurred shapes appearing in the hazy background.

Gazing in wonder, Benton saw the hazy forms develop into piles of stately architecture—pinnacled temples devoted to Priapic mysteries, and of a long past civilization—flanked with dark-leaved trees whose rich, dusky coloring made a remarkable contrast to the ivory-toned columns festooned with scarlet and pale green flowers, and to the burnished orange sky beyond.

The air was pregnant with delight!

Tingling with a delicious hysteria, every dazzling atom glittered with licentious ecstasy!

Every movement in the surrounding atmosphere was a gesture of libidinous delirium!

Weaving in and out, arms and feet and heads keeping time to the music,—now slow and entreating, now quick and tumultuous,—the fantastic cavalcade wound about him until the whole formed a solid ring of dancers leaping and gyrating in frenzied motions, dancing the indecent "circle dance" of olden times; the circle dance of the *Kaldi,* the worshippers of the Moon-God—*ADON;* the circle dance of the *Kadeshim* of the temples.

As if by common consent the dancers stopped, and facing Benton, sang in unison a chaunt of praise of *Iahoh Kadosh,* the god of lasciviousness; sang the song of "lithos," the song of the *phallus*—which Benton represented; the chaunt being accompanied with gestures of the grossest obscenity.

As suddenly as they had stopped, they as suddenly began again to dance lightly around him,—their arms and hips swaying rhythmically,—singing strains of exquisite music; the modulations and intervals being of a kind new and novel to him. The siren melody, soft and seductive, electrified him with a consuming desire; its weird lilt intoxicated him with leaping flames of lechery.

Afire with passion, he gave himself up to the delirium of the phantasm, and stretched out his hands to seize the sylph-like figures dancing by. As they swung past with elusive motions, giving him coy glances and inviting gestures in response to his appeal, a quivering pinkish mist arose before him, making the elfin forms of the dancers vague and indistinct.

Even as he gazed and wondered, the misty cloud faded away, and a vision of ineffable loveliness stood before him.

It was a nude figure of young womanhood, exquisitely graceful, a glorious mantle of red-gold hair enveloping her sensuously curved body.

A Venus clothed in a living flame!

Shining with a silvery sheen, her transparent skin showed the pinkish flush of the hot red blood coursing beneath. Her lips, red as the dull crimson of an Oriental sunset and parted in a seductive smile, disclosed two rows of pearly teeth. Half veiled by a mysterious shadow and framed by drooping lashes, her half closed eyes, lustrous with a slumbering fire, were moist with allurement. Dainty hands, their rosebud finger-tips pressed lightly on her bosom as

though—in her excess of modesty—she would conceal the scarlet nipples that blazed like flames on her ivory-tinted breasts, invited him. Her cheeks, dimpled adorably, bloomed with the flush of a summer dawn. The perfume of her body filled his nostrils with an intoxicating caress.

An apotheosis of carnality!

Benton stood agape; entranced! The mystic spell and the wondrous splendor of her animality overpowered him!

She smiled captivatingly, amused at his astonishment; then, coyly and timidly gathering the long strands of her hair—which hung like a veiling curtain—and drawing them aside, she revealed herself in all her glorious nudity.

Her eyes danced with merriment at his open-mouthed surprise.

Hesitatingly, she held out her warm arms to him, whispering in a voice of bell-like tones:

"Do you not know Me? . . . I am yours! . . . I am LOVE . . . your love . . . the one you have been seeking! . . . Am I not desirable? . . . Do you not want Me now that I have come to you?"

Forgotten for the moment were his past torments!

Forgotten the horrible vermin in their disgusting orgies!

Forgotten the faery vision of the *Bacchantes*, whose song still throbbed with a joyous lilt on the perfume-laden air!

Benton's whole being quivered in response to this apparition of loveliness; whose every curve and every

line seemed tremulous with desire. His eyes lit up with the unholy joy of lust, and as he enveloped her in a close embrace, she wound her hot arms around his neck. Pressing her voluptuous body feverishly, he closed his eyes for an instant in joyous anticipation. Feeling her warm breath on his cheek, he sought her lips with his.

Startled, he opened his eyes . . . He stared, astounded! . . . His arms fell helpless at his sides . . . A frozen look of horror and intense loathing came into his face . . . An icy blast petrified him! . . .

The dimpled face had changed into a festering lump of corruption!

The seductive, smiling mouth was a toothless, grinning hole in which crawled slimy, livid things!

The magnificent, silky tresses were now squirming tentacles that enwrapped him in their noxious clutches!

Shrieking hysterically as he forced himself free from the *thing's* embrace, he was horror-stricken to see that the exquisite, Venus-like figure had changed into that of an obscenely ugly hag with wrinkled, pendant bags for breasts which were swarming with maggots!

The encircling band of spectral dancers now, once more, came into view; and as they pressed forward toward him, their forms changed into hideous shapes of repulsiveness. Their tuneful chaunt was now a wail of mocking taunts and shrieking laughter; and as they moved towards him, their swaying forms gave

out a stench like that of a charnel-house!

The birds and butterflies changed into *things* of demoniac hate; the flowers into deformed faces of depravity from which all hope had fled!

The stately architecture shrivelled and collapsed into bloated mounds of putrescence!

The sky was black!

Sick with nausea, he reeled from the disgusting spectacle only to see a huge, gray shape come hurtling through the air toward him.

A diabolic combination of an octopus with tentacles like the hairy legs of a giant tarantula pounced upon him; and, as it wrapped itself about his head and shoulders, emitted a nameless odor that was overpowering.

Benton fought and struggled to release himself from the coils of this new enemy. In agony he turned in all directions seeking a way of escape from the abominations, but without success.

On all sides he was surrounded by the clutching, rending demons!

The medley of fiends and topsy-turvy monstrosities seemed to have but one purpose;—to tear him limb from limb, and to destroy him.

Beating the air, and striking wildly at his tormentors, shrieking and sobbing in turns, crushed to the ground by the onslaught of the vile brood, he sank, helpless, vainly trying to shield his face.

In the extremity of his agony, he uttered a despairing shriek entreating God to annihilate him, and put him out of his misery.

"Mercy! Mercy! Oh, Christ, have mercy and let me die!" he groaned brokenly.

A thrill ran through his tortured soul.

He felt a cold clamminess rushing past him like the passing of a whirlwind.

A golden Light streamed around him.

The rending and tearing of the demoniac horde had ceased, and his broken soul felt a touch of healing.

Opening his eyes cautiously, fearful of some trick being played on him by the demons, he saw the golden light and, looking up, followed it to its source.

The white Brilliance of the Helper stood before him, and the Radiance enveloped him with a garment of scintillating Light.

"Oh! . . . God . . in . . heaven! . . . Save me! . . . Save me! . . . for Christ's sake!" he moaned.

"I am not God! I am only a Helper; one of His humble servants sent to repentant souls," said the *Voice* in golden tones.

"I . . . I am . . . repentant!" wailed Benton, humbly. "For God's sake . . . take me out of this hell!"

"If you are truly repentant, you must show that you are worthy of God's mercy."

"'God's mercy!'" Benton repeated, bitterly. "If God is merciful, why am I in such torments?"

"You . . . yourself . . . are responsible for your own torments! You are drawn into this vortex of iniquity and malignancy by the force of your own misdeeds. You are but reaping what you, on Earth, have sown! Your thoughts and your desires were

rooted in vileness and sensuality; they have grown into an upas tree in whose tendrils of destruction you are enmeshed!"

"God! Oh, Christ!" he exclaimed, his voice shaking with fear. "Is there no hope for me, No mercy?"

"You may well ask for mercy!" replied the *Voice* in gentle sarcasm. "*You* . . . who were *so* merciful! Look . . . see how merciful *you* were."

Benton's gaze was transfixed in horror as a series of pictures unfolded before him, and followed one after another in rapid succession. They were scenes of his Earth-life; of the incarnation but recently ended. Most of them had been forgotten long ago; many of them merely hazy memories of his youth; now they appeared as if the scenes were taking place before his eyes. Now, he was the spectator looking at himself strutting and playing his part in his own drama of Earth-life. Now, he not merely *saw* the *actions*, but *felt the emotions—the hopes and fears, the pains and disappointments, the anger and shame, the heart-burnings and thoughts of suicide—of those he had wronged.* Now he saw the result of his immoralities; his deflowering of young girls to satisfy his depraved sexual desires; saw the downward path on which he had set their feet, with its shame, degradation and broken hearts; saw the loving couples he had helped to separate; saw his spoken words, cynical and blasphemous, now appearing as living entities, and their effect on immature and erstwhile innocent minds—leading them into the devious paths of worldliness, sensuality and crime.

He groaned in agony as he watched the pictures unfold.

"Enough! Enough!" he protested, trying to shut out the sight, but without succeeding. "Oh, God! have mercy! mercy! I didn't know . . . didn't know!" he wailed. "Oh, God! be merciful to me . . . a fool!"

He sank to the ground in utter abasement; overwhelmed by despair.

"There is yet hope for you,—if you are truly repentant," said the Helper, pityingly. "There is a way by which you can rise out of this dark world of demons."

Benton turned his contorted face upward; a look of hope in his pain-shot eyes.

"As those"—the Helper indicated the raging demons outside the Radiance, "are your own deceitful, hateful, obscene thoughts, you can change your condition by changing your thoughts; also by trying to do good actions, and so offset the evil you have done."

Benton peered through the tremulous Radiance and saw, with a sinking heart, the legion of malignant *things* endeavoring to break through the protecting circle of light to seize him.

"You are responsible for your own state," continued the *Voice.* "Being the creator of his own environment and condition, Man can have light or darkness; good or evil. If you do evil, you reap the results of evil-doing; for by your thoughts you create demons that will rend you. If you think pure thoughts, and do good actions, all the Powers of Evil and Darkness are powerless to harm you. *That is the Law of*

God; the Law of Justice! You are the arbiter of your destiny."

"How was I to know all that?" Benton inquired, querulously.

"You cannot claim ignorance," said the Helper, severely. "In every religious teaching given to Humanity, the Law has been made plain and clear."

"But I didn't believe in religion!" objected Benton.

"In philosophies, which you took a delight in misreading, and putting an obscene meaning on spiritual truths, the Law was enunciated clearly."

"But I knew nothing of any such Law," Benton persisted.

"Your astronomers told you of the marvellous planning of the heavens; how great worlds careering in their orbits sped in their appointed paths in accordance with Law; how even the messengers of solar systems—comets—which, after being lost to human ken, could have the time of their returning foretold with almost absolute precision; merely because the star-watchers knew that they, like the others of the starry host, were under the Law. From the infinitely great to the infinitely small, all are amenable to the Law of the Creator."

"How was I to know that there was a Creator?" asked Benton. "One of the astronomers you have been speaking about—Laplace—said he had swept the heavens with his telescope, and had failed to find God; so . . . "

"Even your own favorite atheistical writers whom you delighted to quote, all concur in agreeing that

Law governs the Universe. If there is a Law, there must, necessarily, be a Law-Maker; or do you imagine that Laws spring into existence haphazard and without any reason.

Because you—a mite on a bit of star-dust floating in an infinity of space—could not conceive of a Law-Maker, and compared to Whom you are as nothing, you found it easier to disbelieve. It salved and allayed your conscience so that it would not trouble you while you pandered and degraded your soul to your animal nature, secure as you imagined in your unbelief. You deliberately refused to believe the evidence of your senses, for all around you were the manifestations of the great Creative Power; from the humble flower of the field growing from a seed into a plant which transformed the so-called inorganic into organic vegetable cells, leaves, and lovely blossoms with exquisite perfume, all the way up to the tremendous forces of Nature; manifestations you airily dismissed as being the result of accident, of fortuitous circumstances, of chance! You had many opportunities to observe the manifestations of Nature, and to note the marvellous design underlying those manifestations; for you had travelled farther over the Earth than had most men, and were gifted with a quick, alert, analytical mind. Instead of devoting your intellectual powers to helping your fellow men by giving them high ideal concepts,— at the same time benefitting yourself,—you preferred using them to debase humanity, and to spread the deadly virus of evil-thinking and evil-doing. *You made your own choice;*

none else compelled. You chose unwisely, and must now reap the fruits of that choice; but you can mitigate the punishment which you have brought upon yourself by trying to do better. It is for you to say which you prefer. Yours to make the choice."

Benton glanced fearfully at the host of lurid demons outside the protecting Radiance.

"I've had enough of this! Tell me what I must do to get out of this infernal torment, and . . . I'll do my best. I cannot do more."

"First, you must blot all hate out of your heart, and learn that the Law of God is 'LOVE.' If you put that into practice, you will take the first and most important step to rise out of the condition you now are in."

"Am I expected to love those who have wronged me?" he asked with a frown.

"Yes! *'Forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those that transgress against us.'* "

"Love my enemies, eh? That is impossible!"

"Attend carefully to what I say, and try to understand; perhaps it will make it easier for you," replied the Helper. "Man is the centre of his own little universe—his own being, which consists of very much more than his physical body; indeed, the physical body is the lowest and fractional part of him, for it is but an animal through which the real man manifests on the physical plane, and uses for the purpose of acquiring knowledge of that earth-plane. You, yourself, now know that the man is a thinking entity apart from and independent of his physical body."

Benton nodded his acquiescence in the statement; the experiences he had gone through made the fact self-evident.

"Man is his own god and . . . his own devil! By the use he makes of the powers given him by still Higher Powers, he can make of his little universe a hell or a heaven; for that universe is formed and affected by his own thoughts and desires. If his thoughts and desires are pure and unselfish, he sees that which is outside himself in its true aspect; but if they are selfish, sensual and filthy, his thought-atmosphere is discolored and muddied, and all that he sees is tinted with the discolorations and dirtiness of that thought-shell. It is as though he lived in a shell of glass of various colors."

Benton indicated that he followed and understood the analogy.

"As you have seen: the man's thoughts are *living forces;* Cosmic forces which he uses to express his desires. If those forces are used to express his revengeful, malignant desires, they recoil on himself—as you have already discovered to your sorrow,—for *they belong to him;* they are his own forces. *And isn't it right and just that he should have what belongs to him?*"

Benton smiled grimly at the question. He wondered how much the Helper knew of him and his traits. It sounded so much like Benton's own self asking the question; for, in his fight for place and recognition, that very phrase was the favorite one he himself used as a final argument against those who sought to

swindle him out of the results and benefits which belonged to him. "I did the work, didn't I? Then I expect to get everything that is coming to me; everything that's due me—to the last red cent!" had been his favorite rejoinder. Now that his own argument was brought forward, he could not but admit its justice.

"If you had built your thought-shell with pure, loving thoughts and high, unselfish desires, you would have had angels of light welcoming you instead of destroying devils; you would be surrounded with living forces of beneficent power through which no destructive forces could break and enter."

Benton's keen, alert mind grasped the teaching eagerly.

"Then this light . . . around you . . . is . . . "

"My thought-atmosphere; the thought-shell formed by my life forces. Some call it 'the aura.' "

"And that is why those . . . demons . . . cannot touch me?" inquired Benton, very much interested by the new paths of knowledge opening out to him. "The forces expressing themselves as light keep them away. Is that it?"

"You are learning rapidly," replied the Helper.

"But you said that they were my own life-forces. How can you keep them away from me if they are part of me?"

"You are not the creator of all those demons, but as 'like attracts like,' so those which have been created by other men and left to disintegrate—for their makers have gone on to higher spheres—are galvanized

into new activity by your own thought-forces being of the same nature, and are attracted to you. Nothing evil, nothing harmful can assail a man unless he has something in his own character which corresponds to that evil, and, therefore, attracts it . . "

"And I . . . I can change my thought-shell to a halo of living light like yours, do you say?" Benton asked anxiously.

"By thinking high, pure thoughts you can purify your thought-shell or 'aura;' and, instead of being a destructive influence, you can be a beneficent power to help those who need helping, and who do not possess your intellectual capacity."

"Then I swear . . . with God's help . . . I will try to do better," said Benton fervently, looking upward.

In wonderment he saw an inverted cone-shaped shaft of exquisite lavender-colored light above him; its apex close to his head. He turned with a questioning glance to the Helper.

"That is a sign that your resolve has been heard on the upper planes of being; and that help from on high is being given to you—to strengthen you."

"Why is it lavender color?" inquired Benton, eager for knowledge.

"It is white, really, and of such high intensity and potency that it would disintegrate and dissolve you into the elements. In love and mercy it has been tempered to accord with your condition."

Benton again looked up at the light, and as he felt the healing balm entering his soul, his face lit up with high resolve. The Helper smiled hopefully,

watching the effect on the actor, and thought of the old adage, "*From great sinners come great saints!*"

"You are fortunate in being able to see that light," the Helper remarked. "Many who come from your earth-world cannot see at all!"

"Cannot see at all!" repeated Benton, with a questioning inflection. "Why, how is that?"

"A large number of the so-called 'educated' inhabitants of your earth-world are materialists; men who live their lives in accordance with their belief that 'mind,' 'force' and other energies are the resultant of 'matter.' When they pass out of their world into this, they, believing that death means annihilation of their consciousness, enter this world almost blind; in some extreme cases, totally blind! They deny their spiritual part to such an extent that their sense of soul-sight becomes atrophied."

"But . . . in my case; how does it happen that my sight . . . "

"Your ideas along those lines were not the result of conviction or deep thought. With you it was merely the easiest way—to lull your conscience. Man is a duality—a spiritual entity dwelling within an animal. Much of your energy was devoted to the desires and instincts of the animal part; but, fortunately, the remainder found an outlet along higher lines—artistic production, which developed and brought into play the attributes of the soul—the creative and intuitional faculties. You, as it were, are a pendulum which swings in a large arc; at one point touching the deeps of animality, sweeping back in its return

swing to a point as high as the other is low. *Incarnation after incarnation you have been doing the same thing, allowing the soul part to be degraded by being enamored of the lusts of the animal; dragging Psyche in the mire and soiling her wings, instead of uplifting and refining the animal nature and using it for the higher purposes of the Soul. And always with the same reaping!* It is said that 'experience makes fools wise!' Have you learned your lesson, or will you, like the Prodigal Son of the parable, eat of the husks—the leavings of the swine—before turning your face to your Father's house—your spiritual home? With your powerful will and alert, brilliant mind, what a force for good you could be!"

"Strangely enough," said Benton ruefully, "I have a feeling that . . . er . . . this sort of thing"—he glanced at the horde outside the Radiance—"has happened before; but I cannot quite place it—can't just remember."

"It has happened more than once," stated the Helper, reminiscently. "I have been here to meet you many, many times! When you progress to a higher plane, you will remember."

"Tell me," said Benton, a new tone of strength in his voice. "Tell me what I can do. I am anxious to begin!" He stood erect, his whole being filled with high resolve.

"The first good deed you can and should do, is to help to prove Waller innocent of the crime of murder."

Benton made no reply. He was thinking!

A picture appeared before his eyes,—the scene on

board the ocean liner when Waller had struck him. A maddening rage began to swirl through him.

"Stop! Stop! Do not add to your thought-shell any more demons of revenge!" warned the Helper. "If Waller has done any wrong, *he* will suffer for it; *he, being responsible for the sowing, he will reap the result!* You can safely leave it to the Great Law of Justice. You who have experienced a *little* of the sufferings consequent on wrong-doing should have thoughts of sympathy for him, not revenge."

Benton nodded bravely. "I see. I see now! It will come very hard at first because I am naturally a fighter, and because I'll probably forget, but . . . I'll conquer!" he added with a grim look. "Anyway . . . I guess I deserved it!"

"Good! Now perhaps you can understand the meaning of '*Forgive our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us;*' and also that other ancient saying: 'Hatred doth not cease by hatred, but by love!' "

Benton reflected a moment, then nodded thoughtfully. "I am ready, if you will show me how to help him," he said definitely. "Do you know," he added with a whimsical smile, "I am rather curious to see how the Law works out."

The Helper smiled gladly, and put his arm around Benton's shoulders.

"Then come with me, and you shall know what happiness really means! Happiness is what all men and women are seeking. Their religious teachers and philosophers all point out the 'Way,' but poor conceited Humanity will not believe and persists in going the

wrong way. Instead of developing the spiritual side of themselves—which is the permanent part of man—by helping each other, they develop the animal part—which is only a temporary habitation for the spirit—by endeavoring to seize and conserve for themselves all that they can. However successful they may have been in doing this,—piling up wealth and various other possessions,—when they die and leave all behind them, they find on entering this world of spirits that they are poor indeed—for, they have nothing! Like the dog in the fable: they have seized at the shadow, and missed the substance—the spiritual.

Benton's lips set in a sad smile. "I guess they are like myself; they have to learn through bitter experience!"

XXII.

While Benton was learning a little of the workings of the Great Law of Justice in the world of discarnate souls; those whom he had left behind in the Earth-world were going through experiences which, to them, were torments—a hell upon earth!

With the dawning of the day following the fatal night of Benton's murder and Jack's arrest, poor Tom Cogan arose wearily from the bed on which he had spent a sleepless night.

Through the dragging hours of darkness, he had lain with wide open eyes, waiting for the light of day which seemed would never come. He had painfully gone over all the details of the affair, again and again, weighing the evidence for and against his brother-in-law, only to arrive at the same conclusion; and from which, so far as he could see, there was no escape. That conclusion was: Jack was guilty! Jack had killed the actor! When he tried to delve deeper into the matter, seeking a motive for the act, he had to confess himself baffled.

One solution which occurred to his tired mind,—one of doubtful value, but worth considering as a possible line of defence,—was that Jack had, in some way, broken down under the terrific strain of the life at the

"front;" and that the tension and excitement of his activities as a member of the Escadrille had affected his reason. In other words: Jack Waller had had a "brain-storm"! He had read in the newspapers of numerous instances where strong men had broken down under the unusual strain of the noise and concussion of the big guns, and had become nervous wrecks; being obliged to leave the scene of strife and frightfulness, and go to some quiet place to recover, and to rest their shattered nerves.

'Evidently, that is the reason! In Jack's case the breakdown didn't happen over there, but was postponed until it showed for the first time on board ship.'—So Cogan's thoughts ran as he turned over in his mind the probabilities of such being the solution of the motive. 'That is the only hope I can see; and at that, it might be worked up into a fairly strong defence.' The pleas of "brain-storms" and "temporary insanity" had saved others from the electric chair, so why not use it in his brother-in-law's case?—he argued. Jack had everything in his favor otherwise. He was well liked and had made lots of friends in the little town, some of whom, he hoped, would be sitting on the jury.

"Yes," he muttered, "that's the best defence! All we need is a good alienist to testify along those lines." The thought of the expense the engaging of such an expert would mean came into his mind, "But God only knows where the money is to come from!"—which brought him back to his own pecuniary problems.

It certainly seemed that everything was against him and his ambition. In another twenty-four hours the comedy would have been finished, and he would

have been richer by one thousand dollars, and looking forward to seeing his play make a hit with the possibility of a long run on Broadway. He felt so sure of its success. He was no fool! He knew! Hadn't he carefully and as unbiasedly as possible compared his witty lines and funny situations with the punk stuff that were the popular hits? Of course he knew! Besides, only last night, hadn't Benton gone into raptures over the whimsicalites and word-play; bursting into laughter as he read the lines with that inimitable, unctuous cackle in his voice, and the side-splitting comical expression of distress on his face?

"Only—last night!" repeated Cogan, despondently.

Dwelling on the thought of how near he had been to the goal of his ambition, to the fruition of all his hopes, to the crowning of his labors with success, a feeling of rancor arose in his heart.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed. "If the young fool *had* to kill, why the devil didn't he pick on somebody else instead of Benton? Plenty of others in the world who wouldn't be missed; but no . . it must be Benton! And right at this time, too, when everything promised so well. If he had to kill *him*, why in hell couldn't he wait until . . ."

It had been said, and truly, that we make our own heaven and our own hell! Poor Cogan, cogitating and brooding over the opportunity now lost, and through no fault of his own, created (unknown to himself) thought-forms that vaguely resembled scorpions which stung him into a fury of passionate anger. He, a big-hearted, generous soul who in his normal condition would not hurt a fly, let alone do harm to a fellow-being, now, by the mis-use of his thought-forces, was

rapidly working himself into an abnormal state of resentment against his brother-in-law—one of his dearest and best beloved chums.

Verily—to paraphrase an ancient Scriptural saying, —we suffer from ourselves; none else compels!

Verily, we make our own hell!

Fortunately for him, his nervous system was in such a state that he soon felt the depleting effect of his passionate outburst; and, strong man though he was, ended by his breaking down and sobbing like a child, feeling ashamed of having given way to such unworthy thoughts.

"What a mean cuss I am," he muttered penitently. "Poor old Jack! He needs your help, not your reproaches . . . you skunk!" he cried, addressing himself as he prepared for his morning plunge. "The boy is in trouble, in a confoundedly bad hole; so it is up to you to find a way out of it, you . . . big stiff, you!" He viciously banged the wet sponge against his burning head.

In the adjoining room, Mrs. Cogan was lying on her bed in her dressing gown;—thinking.

After she and her husband returned home from their visit to the Police Station, and he had sorrowfully kissed her good night and gone to his own room, she proceeded to undress with the intention of going to bed; but the letters under the mattress haunted and irritated her. Though unseen, they exerted on her an

influence of uneasiness. They were so many accusing fingers pointing at her; and although they were covered and out of sight, in her mind's eye she could see them as plainly as if they were exposed to her physical eyes. The lavender-colored envelopes, and the narrow pale-blue ribbon that bound them together, appeared vividly before her; all . . . except the writing inside on the notepaper; and she longed to see and read to find out, after all these years, what kind of a silly fool she had been, and how far she had compromised herself in the writing of them.

They worked powerfully on her imagination! So strongly did they affect her, that it was not long before she found herself going through the same mental distress she had gone through when Benton still had them in his possession, and had threatened her with exposure. Rapidly approaching the breaking point, she realized that if she did not read the letters, and get the agonizing torture over and done with, she would have a fit of hysterics. Not hearing her husband's usual stertorous breathing, she surmised he was awake, and might, at any moment, take it into his head to come to her room to see if she also were awake, and spend his sleepless hours talking over her brother's predicament.

She was between the devil and the deep sea!

Finally, she could stand the suspense no longer! "I must read them, and run the risk of Tom coming in; otherwise I shall go crazy!"—so she told herself.

Putting her dressing gown on, she turned the small electric reading lamp on her table so that its light shone on the door between the two bedrooms, and threw a shadow on the pillow and upper part of the bed. "I

won't be caught unaware, anyhow," she muttered, smiling at her own cunning; then, throwing herself on the bed with sufficient noise to announce the fact to her husband (who would think she had retired for the night), she reached under the mattress, and pulled out the package of letters. Under cover of the pillow, she untied the ribbon and brought out the top envelope. In the half light of the shadow cast on her, she hastily opened it and drew forth the folded letter. She stared at it—astonished! It wasn't her writing! Not knowing what to think, she commenced reading it.

The letter, written in a small masculine script, was as follows:

"My dear, clever little innocent:

Being a 'fun-maker' by profession, and—if I may without undue egotism say so—a very good one, I am naturally prone to look at the humorous side of life. (There's a lot of grim humor in the world, if you only know where to look for it!) So—I like playing practical jokes! And—I do hope you will enjoy this one as much as I do.

"Years ago, as you probably remember, I evolved a little scheme by which I could add a trifle to my cup of happiness; and, at the same time, introduce you to the joys and delights of love. Unfortunately for me and my contemplated pleasure, my plan miscarried owing to your absurd old-fashioned objections. You dear little Puritan!

"I am not accustomed to having my plans thwarted, so (I confess it now) I felt my defeat very keenly. Judge of my surprise and delight on meeting you again! Not an immature rosebud this time, but a full-blown blossom in all its voluptuous beauty!

Now to me, the great unpardonable sin is: to miss my opportunity! So much for your part in the comedy. Now to the other.

Your beloved, dashing, handsome, brave, etc., etc., hero brother whom I had the *honor* of meeting on the liner, forgot himself to the extent of insulting me; even going so far as to put his damned, dirty paws on me!

When I had the further *honor* of meeting him in your house, the insolent, conceited puppy again insulted me!

'Everything comes to him who waits,' and, do you know? *I am a very good waiter!* also—revenge is all the sweeter for the waiting; especially when one is doubly revenged—as I am.

Now that you have exchanged your *precious, pure, innocent virtue* for these letters—excuse me a moment while I laugh!—you can probably see the point and enjoy the joke, and—my revenge at the same time.

Ever your 'friend,'

KARL BENTON.

P. S. Be sure to tell your *hero brother* the joke—he will enjoy it!

P. P. S. Be sure and don't forget to tell him."

As she read the words slowly, a look of blank astonishment came over her face. Thrusting her hand under the pillow, she drew out the other letters. The envelopes were new, but had been crumpled and soiled to give them the appearance of age. They bore no name or address; were bare of writing save the words: "*The same joke!*" "*Still the same joke!*" "*Again the same*

joke!" "*And yet again—the same joke!*" the remainder being variations of the same phrase.

She opened the envelopes one by one.

They were all empty!

There was not a single line or word of her writing in the whole batch, excepting the name and address on the first envelope; which, he had, probably, found among some old letters.

As the appalling fiendishness of his deviltry became apparent to her, she thought that she would go raving mad! All the time he was holding those letters over her head, threatening her with them if she refused to give up her body to his lustful desires, the dastardly scoundrel was merely bluffing her! Evidently, he had written this letter in the full expectation and assurance that his damnable scheme of luring her to his apartment to sell her honor for what purported to be her letters would be successful.

She crammed the pillow between her teeth to stop the shriek, that boiled within her, finding utterance! Her head was bursting; the veins stood out on her throat and temples like cords.

"The cold-blooded devil!" she mumbled thickly. "To deliberately try to ruin my life, and wreck a happy home where he had been welcomed as a friend. The villain! The black-hearted reprobate! Why God allows such a scoundrel to breathe, and poison the air . . ."

Her tirade broke off short; for she suddenly remembered that Benton's body was lying stiff and cold in the Police Station.

A glow of intense satisfaction spread over her face.

"Huh! It was about time his father—the devil—got

him! God knows it wasn't any too soon. I hope he will suffer the tortures of the damned, and get what is coming to him!" A pious wish which seemed to soothe and calm her.

Tearing the envelope addressed in her writing into small fragments, she put them in one of the other envelopes which she fastened securely. Tying the letters together, she caught sight of the words, "*The same joke!*" Benton had written on an envelope.

"Yes, my noble bucko!" she muttered exultantly; "'tis the same old joke; and it's on you, mister cleverbones! I hope *you* are enjoying it," she added sarcastically.

The package of letters having been safely hidden under the mattress, she turned off the light, and gave herself up to meditating on the situation.

"So Jack put his 'dirty' hands on him, did he? I guess that means that Jack punched him. Good for him! I wonder why? I'll have to ask Jack about it."

Her thoughts went to her brother, wondering what he was doing at that moment. Was he asleep, or was he, also, sleepless and occupied with his thoughts. Good old Jack! Well, it would be all right tomorrow; God bless him! Now that the threatened danger of the letters was over, she could tell Jack all about the affair, and so enable him to speak and prove his innocence.

"I can also tell Tom, now . . ." she began; but the question, 'Tell him what?' faced her and took her by surprise. Her new-born hope of informing her husband, and so proving Jack innocent was nipped in the bud.

"Oh! dear God! what *can* I tell him?" she thought in dismay. "I'm no better off now than I was before,

for he would see that I had written *some* letters which I was ashamed of, and—heavens! the fat would be in the fire just as bad as if he had the letters in his hand!" That phase of the matter had not occurred to her. "Oh! I am worse off than ever. If he had my letters to read, I could explain about them; but now . . . now that they do not exist, and cannot be read . . . the good Lord only knows what he *would* imagine!"

Her predicament was as hopeless as it had ever been, and the possibility of her brother being shown innocent by anything she was at liberty to say was as remote as before. Her hands were tied, and she was helpless! All that she could do was to go through the torture of the coming days, with her own dread secret locked in her heart; hoping and praying that her brother would not have to suffer more than a temporary incarceration, and be free by something happening (she knew not what) to prove his innocence.

The dawn found her no nearer the solution of the problem; and when she heard her husband taking his morning bath, she got off the bed to dress herself. With a splitting headache, and weary from lack of sleep, she stared dully at the pink light showing through the trees; speculating on what this day, and the days to come, held in store for her, and what other miseries she had yet to experience.

As with many of her passionate, full-blooded type, her language now and then was a trifle more forcible

than the occasion called for; and she was fond of punctuating her speech with, what a more staid person would call, profanity. Where the ordinary, conventional woman would say, "My goodness," she would say, "My God;" which, of course, is a difference merely of degree, not of kind. When she felt that a strong term was needed, she ripped out a full-sized, well-rounded "damn!"—which in her case did not mean that she was profane, but simply denoted a strong nature giving vent to feelings under high pressure.

In the bohemian, happy-go-lucky coterie of her friends, who did not pay much attention to the little non-essentials of a person so long as the fundamentals were sound, her idiosyncracy passed unheeded. They knew that her heart was a big one and in the right place; and they were too broad-minded to let a few "cuss" words blind them to her solid virtues. The few strait-laced ones she met now and then, (who, while they may have *thought* profanity, were careful enough of the conventions not to offend by uttering it, and considered it "low" if not positively indecent of her to use such expressions in public,) opined that Mrs. Cogan was not a person they could safely associate with; which was a pity, for, in the true essentials of womanhood, she was a good woman.

Was any movement started in the village to alleviate suffering of any sort,—helping a farm laborer who had met with an accident, thereby throwing his family on the charity of the public; or collecting money for the poor to tide them over the winter months; she was there in the forefront with two willing hands and a heart overflowing with the milk of human kindness.

Many a poor woman who could not sew, either for

lack of time or knowledge, remembered her with gratitude for some sorely needed garments stitched by her nimble fingers, or put together on her sewing machine. Sometimes the help took the form of crisp pies, and delicacies for those who needed but did not have the wherewithal to buy them.

Like most of her race, she was versatile and also a good organizer; a combination that was always at the service of anyone who was not so well equipped. *But the Irish have the fatal gift of imagination!* In the cradles, when their mothers' backs were turned, the babies listened to the crooning and weaving of spells of the pixies, little green-goodfellows, and leprechauns, and had their foreheads touched with the wands of the fairies, elves, and sprites of the unseen world of nature-spirits, endowing them with imaginative powers that, rightly used, can be pinions to cleave the empyrean, or, misused, chains to fetter them in the pit of Tantalus. It is owing to that characteristic that they are extremists; up on the crest of the wave of hopefulness today, down in the trough of despair tomorrow. Light-hearted and gay one minute, the next finds them sad at heart—crooning their melancholy melodies. Like all those belonging to the mercurial temperament, they are as brave as lions while the sun is shining and the blood runs hot; but downcast as their own weeping skies when the shadows of life fall upon their souls; for then their imaginative faculty comes into its own, and plays havoc with them!

A true daughter of Erin, Mrs. Cogan was cursed with the imagination of her people. Not seeing clearly whither her life-path wended its way, she imagined

all sorts of fearful probabilities. If, at the very beginning of her troubles, she had gone to her husband and told him the whole story of her acquaintance with the actor, she would have saved herself, her brother, and her husband many unhappy hours. Cogan with his quick Irish temper would have, no doubt, flared up and ripped holes in the atmosphere in the exuberance of his passion; but in ten or fifteen minutes—after he had used up all his expletives—the clouds would have passed away, and forgiveness would have been freely given her. As it was, her imagination was too much for her.

Which prompts us to again remark, "We make our own hell!"

XXIII

Occultists are well aware that this Earth of ours is one of the "hells."

Millions on millions of years ago, when the group of infant souls called "Humanity" first entered on their activities on this planet, Earth was a Paradise which knew no evil, no suffering, no death. As those infant souls developed intellect they were, up to a certain point in their evolution, guarded and guided by men of an advanced type (of another and previous evolution) who taught them how to use their budding intellectual powers wisely and well; and, within certain limits (toward evil), they were allowed free scope for their energies. "Freewill within limits."

After passing a certain point in his evolution, whatever "Man" did, he was held responsible for the results of his actions,—precisely as children are responsible only after a certain age; hence, in all the great religions is found—variously phrased—the warning: "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!*"

Due partly to the allurement of the lustful, animal, lower nature; partly owing to his overweening conceit of his intellectual attainments and material achievements, MAN has by his selfishness, cruelty, and ambition for personal power turned the erstwhile Paradise into what closely resembles a hell.

Just as the Great Universal Law—which is Justice—repays with beneficence all those who live and work in accordance with that Law, so IT inexorably demands full reparation from those who break the Law. *That reparation is exacted in the world wherein the deeds were done;* hence re-incarnation, or re-birth of the soul into new bodies, life after life. The man who finds his opportunity in another's necessity, and takes advantage of his weakness, inexperience or ignorance to do him harm, sooner or later finds that he must repay,—even to the "uttermost farthing." *That is "Karma"—the Law of Cause and Effect in the Moral World.*

Until the former paradisaical condition of Earth is restored, real, lasting happiness will not be possible in this vale of woe and tears; for as we (MAN) are responsible for the present conditions through the *mis*-use of our thought-power, we are under the obligation to right the wrongs we have done; to make the crooked straight; to change into good that which we have made evil; in short, *to repay!*

As an old Scripture says: "*Thought in the mind hath made us. What we are, by thought was wrought and built. If a man's mind hath evil thoughts, pain comes on him as comes the wheel the ox behind. All that we are, is what we thought and willed; our thoughts shape us and frame.*"

Most of us go through life wondering why "success" has not attended our efforts.

All around us we see our fellows striving mightily for . . . what? A brief season of success—*material success*, not knowing that success in the material sense of fame, honors, wealth, possessions, does not *always* connote *real success;* in fact, from the higher viewpoint it does but rarely. Hence we see that most of those who generally achieve success on this material plane of being, are those who are the most materially minded; with the blatant voice of the ass, the cunning of the fox, the cruelty of the tiger, the thick hide of the rhinoceros, the fangs of the wolf, the animality of the hyena. There are, of course, exceptions; but they are few and far between.

The seers of humanity—the poets, philosophers, musicians, artists, all those who are aglow with spiritual light, and full of the message of the coming day—struggle unknown and unheeded by their more materialistic fellows.

Our friend Tracy— the short-story writer—whom we introduced in the early part of our narrative, was one of those whose souls had awakened to higher things than the flesh-pots of Egypt. Unfortunately for him, when in a former incarnation the opportunity for his spiritual growth had come to him, he had gazed longingly at the heights; but, allured by the glamor of things of the earth—earthy, he had allowed the favorable occasion to slip by. Now, due to his unwise choice, in this incarnation he had the intense longing, but no practical training which would enable him to gain the knowledge he desired of spiritual things, and their relation to mundane happenings. In other

words: he was a *psychic*, not an *occultist;* a dreamer of strange dreams, but without the scientific training which would have given him the power to read the meaning of his dreams.

Owing to his limitations, he could not correlate the "effects" with their "causes." Although aware—intuitionally—of the Law of Justice—the Law of Karma, *practically* he could not trace the happenings in his work-a-day world back to their antecedents in the higher planes; therefore, he was discontented and unhappy.

Capable of doing more important work, by the force of circumstances (his thoughts, actions and desires in previous lives) he was kept with his nose to the grindstone, writing short stories of a flimsy, melodramatic type for his bread and butter.

In his time he had tried many and various occupations. He had been a wanderer on the face of the earth ever since he had run away from home, a mere youth full of the wanderlust, and shipped as cabin-boy on board an old tramp hooker plying between Boston and the Far East. On his first voyage, the ship was bound for China and Australia. By the time he reached Sydney, he had had enough of the sea—enough to last him for some time; so he roamed about in the interior of the country, going from town to town, doing anything and everything from clerking to bar-tending.

A longing for his native soil finally brought him back to this country; travelling by devious routes which took him through Europe and part of Africa. Landing in San Francisco, he bought a miner's outfit and joined the long line of men bitten by the "gold

bug." Wrecked in the icy waters outside Nome, and losing everything he possessed except his money-belt and tent—which he recovered from the water, he concluded that success for him was not to be found with a pick and shovel in the Klondike gold fields.

Gradually, he made his way across the continent to land in an eight by twelve room in an artists' studio building, where he banged on a typewriter from early evening till early morning; turning his experiences into short stories of hair-raising excitement, to be read by spindle-shanked office clerks and anaemic stenographers who lived and experienced (while the story lasted) all the fierce joys and thrills of the red-blooded, hairy-chested, heavily-muscled heroes, and fearless, passionate, Amazonian heroines in their numerous exploits of primeval life conjured up by his vivid and fertile imagination.

About a year ago, he struck a slightly different vein in his stories. Convinced that he was not "getting anywhere" with what he called his "punk rubbish" —which he put in the same category as the "pretty girl" magazine cover,—he began seriously meditating on what would be the final outcome.

"A nice occupation for a full-grown, healthy man, —doing woman's work. Namby-pamby, kiss-me-pretty truck!" He snorted in disgust. "Darn it! The ordinary laborer digging ditches or planting spuds is doing something useful, while I—" His face puckered into an expression of scorn. "And I flatter myself that I am above the common herd!—prostituting my God-given talents—to feed my belly and clothe my body and keep a roof over my head! Pah! Is that all the use I am? Is that all my brain is good for?

And to keep doing it until I turn my toes up to the daisies? Whew!" He banged his old corn-cob pipe against the edge of the table to empty it of the ashes, and, at the same time, give emphasis to his feelings.

One result of his self-analysis was: he resolved that his stories should not only interest his readers, but, in future, should bear a moral lesson of some kind. He had often thought of it before, and had made tentative attempts along that line; and while he had, in his personal affairs, welcomed anything pertaining to spiritual things and the "higher thought," yet, in his literary work, he had bowed to the advice of his editors;—which was to the effect that the public wanted entertainment, not sermons.

His resolve had attracted to him a "helper" who, working on the higher planes of being for the benefit of the "orphan"—Humanity, took advantage of Tracy's psychic temperament and sensitiveness to throw into his mind ideas and plots for stories that would give him the opportunity of bringing valuable spiritual teachings to the notice of his readers. (Reversing the process of sugaring the pill by putting a pill in the sugar). So full was he of this new resolve, and also of appreciation for the aid given him by his unseen collaborator (for he recognized that the new ideas came from a higher source than his brain; being too clever and original for his mentality to originate), that he proceeded to make the life of Cogan—and other editors—miserable; begging to be allowed to try out the ideas if only as an experiment. When it is understood that most of the editors of the magazines he wrote for insisted on cutting out everything

pertaining to psychic matters, even going so far—in one instance—as putting a ban on the word "psychic," his lack of success with the man of the blue pencil was not at all surprising.

Cogan was a fair sample of that sort of editor.

"I tell you, Tracy, people who read magazines are the same people who go to the theatres; and they read the mags for the same reason that they go to see a show! They want to be amused and entertained, not to be preached at. When people want to listen to a sermon—which isn't very often, they go to church. You take my tip, old scout: give them plenty of blood and fighting with some sentimental love-mush judiciously thrown in as you have done all along, and your stuff will find a market; but if you talk about spiritual things, or sermonize, I'll have shoals of letters from my readers telling me to 'can' you. They'll tell me darn quick that I am not supposed to be running a Sunday School magazine."

Such was the advice given Tracy; which made the writer hot and angry.

"Say, Cogan," he replied, eyeing the editor commiseratively, "you fellows give me an awful pain! You sit in your chairs, and imagine that you have your fingers on the public's pulse, when all the while you are about ten years behind the times! You learn your trade of editing when you are young, and then you stop growing instead of keeping pace with the rest of humanity. Apparently, you don't give your readers credit for having a very high order of mentality."

Cogan laughed good-naturedly. "Sure, Mike,"—ironically, "that's the reason the boss is paying me my salary—because I am such a dub! Why, you old

scarecrow, don't you know that we fellows are always looking for new stuff . . . "

"Ye-ah! You *say* you are," Tracy broke in; "but when a chap like myself comes along with something different, you turn me down—flat!"

"When I said 'new,' I didn't mean *crazy* stuff, such as you want to inflict on me."

"Huh! What does your 'new' stuff amount to, anyway? Nothing! Absolutely nothing different from the stuff of ten or twenty years ago. If there is a difference, it consists in being more superficially clever; more snappy sentences, more slang, more sophisticated sex talk with the accent on the *lingerie*, and a closer approach to the limits of decency. That's the only difference I can see."

The editor shrugged his shoulders. He did not feel like arguing the point.

"Only a few weeks ago," continued Tracy, full of his subject, "I gave Wingal a detective story to read. It was darned good, too. He turned it down. Do you know why?"

"Oh, I can give a shrewd guess! I suppose you threw in a lot of your talk on spiritual development, pointing out the awful result of . . . "

"Not at all! Not a scrap! I opened my story with two of the minor characters, which, according to his notions, was wrong. He said the best way,—in fact, the only way, was to start with the two most prominent characters and establish them in the readers' minds."

"That's one of the advantages of taking a course in a School of Journalism!" interjected the editor, parenthetically.

"I pointed out to him—and the same thing applies to you, Cogan—that he had asked for a new treatment, a new twist, and now when I gave it to him the skate wanted it done in the same old conventional way."

"I am not answerable for Wingal and his damphool notions," Cogan replied cheerfully. "If it was O. K. otherwise, and fitted in with our policy, I wouldn't turn it down on that account. Not by a long shot!"

"Perhaps not," retorted Tracy doubtfully, "but you would find some other objection quite as absurd. Now, concerning this spiritual talk of mine which you call 'crazy,' . . . "

"Back to the same old gag! Say, Tracy, you are getting dippy over that stuff! For the Lord's sake, what's the matter with you, anyhow? Aren't you satisfied to go along as you have been doing, giving the public what they want, and . . . "

"Huh! That's just the point!" the writer exclaimed heatedly. "You think the people want and prefer the punk they get, when the truth is, they take it because we don't give them better stuff, and they must have something to read."

"Well . . . that is your opinion."

"It isn't only my opinion; it is a fact! Why . . . only the other day—coming down in the Subway, I overheard a conversation between two poorly dressed ginks from the East Side, one of them with RUMSEY'S in his fist, and what do you think they were saying?"

"The good Lord only knows," responded Cogan, yawning. "Probably cooking up some scheme to skin us poor devils of Gentiles."

"They were actually deploring the low grade of literature in the popular magazines!"

"I guess they were high-brows in disguise," laughed Cogan. "Anyway, I quite agree with them; even if they were Bolsheviki."

"Then why not let me try my stuff out?" pressed Tracy, anxiously. "If only as an experiment."

"Because they would not fall for it, old chap," replied the editor, positively. "You take it from me, old man: what the dear public wants are legshows, melodrama with lots of thrills, movies full of crazy stunts such as jumping off high cliffs, train wrecks, aeroplane accidents, handsome young fellows rescuing the doll-faced sweethearts from the low-browed hairy-chested villain, or movies whose star is a dame with a rotten reputation—the worse it is the better for the box office—playing in scenes that will give her a chance to show as much of her flesh as she can without being pulled in for indecent exposure." He puffed vigorously at his cigar to keep it alight. "Go down Broadway any old day you like, and notice which theatres are doing the biggest business. Sex plays and melodrama! Plays whose only *raison d'etre* is showing mix-ups in bedrooms and other private places. And the more suggestive and rotten the truck is, the better the people like it; more especially if there are posters in the lobby showing girls in pajamas in a bedroom, or big-busted, thick-legged women with as few clothes on as the law allows. You remember that film they'd spent so much money on—I forget the name, which they showed in one of the theatres near Forty-Second Street? It was a dead failure until some slick duck had the brilliant idea of putting on the stage

a bunch of real-to-goodness live bathing girls in scanty one-piece bathing costumes which were skin-tight; then —psst!—the mob swamped the place—actually wrecked the box-office in the crush, and they had to call out the Police Reserves to maintain order! I tell you, Tracy: the majority of human beings are cattle, still in the animal stage, with a very thin veneer of pretence to hide their animality."

"Gee! I'd hate to accept Broadway as being representative of this great and glorious country of mine, and of the hundreds, nay, thousands of clean-minded, clean-living men and women," said Tracy, violently dissenting; "but since you are willing, let me remind you that the morality play, '*Everybody*' was not only a huge success on Broadway, but is still running and going strong; being played to full houses throughout the country. It was an expensive production, so there must be a raft of people who enjoy that spiritual preachment—otherwise the play would have been shelved long ago."

"Oh, I guess they go because of its novelty, but our readers don't want any moralizing in their stories; they want straight stuff."

"Yeh, that's exactly what all the editors of the evening papers told Reeder when he proposed writing a couple of sticks every evening along the higher thought lines. So he offered to do it for a month without pay —as an experiment, and then stop; if the readers asked for more, he was to be paid and taken on as a regular member of the staff. The result was: he did that kind of stuff for two solid years; and when he quit to write a book, the paper got hold of Dr. Blaine to continue the column. He has practically made the

paper with his column, and his stuff is syndicated all over the country. That's the answer to your Broadway argument!" He leaned over and helped himself to one of his friend's cigars, and lighting it, strolled over to the window to allow his talk to sink in.

Cogan sat turning the matter over in his mind. He was aware that interest was growing rapidly in this so-called "higher-thought," but surmised that its growth was due to its being a fad and a novelty, which would die out as thousands of other fads had. Judging the great mass of Americans by the heterogeneous hodge-podge—mostly hyphenates—in New York City, whose distinctive marks of political wire-pulling, revolutionary tendencies of a wild and anarchistic sort, un-moral and im-moral characteristics of the Orientalistic peoples who loomed large in the city's affairs, peoples whose ideals resided in their cerebellums and connected in a straight line with their bellies, Cogan imagined that the people in the other parts of the country were tarred with the same brush; the New Yorker being so prone to think of his city as the only one worth taking into consideration. Knowing that New York is the metropolis of *business* of the Eastern part of the country, he took it for granted that it was, also, the metropolis of the thought, the virtues, the learning, the ideals, and the clean living (that were the basic fundamentals on which our great men had erected the edifice of our American civilization); instead of being, what it really is, the byword of all the civilized nations, and the scorn of all the rest of the country.

He didn't for a moment believe that there was a great and ever growing greater number of persons

who were turning to the study of higher thought because they, imbued with the scientific spirit of the age, desired more exact data regarding spiritual matters than they were able to get in the orthodox church teachings and pulpits.

Not possessing the scientific love of "facts, facts, and yet more facts," he was perfectly content to go to church fairly regularly (if only as a good example to others), listen to the preacher's comments on the text chosen, and . . . let it go at that. Why other folks could not "let it go at that" instead of worrying themselves crazy about matters of the other world he could not understand! Physical existence with its friendships, its "good times," its loves and hates, its struggles and prizes, interested him very much more than matters of a future life. Whenever he did happen to think of it—when it was forced on his attention, he knew of course that he would, some time, have to "turn up his number twelves to the daisies" (as he humorously put it), but he sincerely hoped that the time for that was still a long way off; then . . . as soon as he could . . . he turned to other and more pleasant thoughts.

When Cogan, deeply cogitating, glanced at Tracy staring dreamily out of the window, and noticed his care-worn, tired-looking face, its skin furrowed with countless fine lines, a wave of sympathy came over him.

'He is a good old scout,' he thought, 'even if he is a bit batty on that higher thought rubbish.'

His generous nature prompted him to give the writer a chance, and to let him try a story along the lines suggested. He weighed the question judicially, for,

as he reminded himself, it was his boss' money he was spending not his own, so personal likes and dislikes ought not to influence him. 'He is getting on in years, poor old chap, and even if the thing didn't pan out right, he would feel all the better for having been given the opportunity. Anyhow'—he ruminated, 'even if it was a fizzle, I could stand the racket with the old man; and . . . I'm used to that!'—with a grim smile.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Tracy, old scout!" he said, swinging his swivel chair to face the writer.

Tracy slowly turned, a faraway look in his eyes, and a soft glow of rapture on his face as though he had been communing with beings of a higher plane.

"I'll give you your chance! You write a yarn along the lines you wish, but for goodness sake, keep the soft pedal down on the spiritual stuff. Go easy with the crazy talk."

"Do you really mean that?" Tracy asked joyfully.

"Wait now! Wait till I finish," advised the editor. "This is the proposition: If it gets more knocks than bouquets from my readers, you are not to get a red cent; but if there are fewer kicks than encomiums, you get your usual rates. How does that strike you?"

"I'll go you on that proposition," cried the writer, grabbing his hat and holding out his hand to Cogan. "I'll get busy right away!"

"All right, but go easy now, and don't forget . . . the soft pedal," Cogan reminded him as he was closing the door. "Hm, hm! This is where I get a calling down from the boss, I suppose," he muttered. "Oh, well," he sighed, "what's the difference? Old Tracy looked as happy as if I had given him a mil-

lion dollars!" He scratched his head with his blue pencil, at a loss to understand why the writer looked so pleased.

How blind we mortals sometimes are!

Into the story which Tracy wrote was injected in a seemingly unconscious way a running commentary of a philosophical and moralizing turn of thought on the actions of the characters. When he submitted it for Cogan's verdict, the editor after reading it turned a look of surprise on Tracy.

"I thought you were going to put some higher thought stuff in the yarn," he remarked. Like lots of others he did not recognize it except when it was labelled clearly, or appeared in publications devoted to that kind of literature.

Tracy smiled, and scratched the back of his ear.

"Got cold feet, eh?" the editor asked. "It is just as well, for it is a darned good story, and as good as you have ever done, and it would be a pity to spoil it with your crazy obsession."

"Awfully glad you like it," murmured Tracy, softly.

When the usual batch of letters began to come in from those readers who took it upon themselves to act as critics—damning or praising the various contributions in the magazine, the editor sat up and rubbed his eyes. Not only did most of his correspondents praise the handling of the story, commenting favorably on the high character and tone running through

the narrative, but actually wanted more and of the same kind of "higher thought."

"What's the matter with them?" queried Cogan, as he read letter after letter. "They must be as looney as old Tracy himself! I didn't spot any high thought stuff in it! Here is one duck and . . . two, three, four of them using the same phrase, 'high spiritual tone of the writing.' Can you beat it?"

Tracy was elated when the comments on his story were shown to him.

"Of course, I hate to rub it into you, Cogan, old fellow, but . . . didn't I tell you? I knew how it would be! People are just hungry for spiritual things."

"All right," Cogan agreed. "If they want it, we will give it to them. They'll be pleased, you'll be pleased, and I guess the old man won't kick if the subscription list swells out a bit. So, go to it, old scout, and give us all you can."

Which was easier said than done!

Authors must sleep sometime, and Tracy was not as young as he used to be in the days when he could sit plugging away at his typewriter for three consecutive days and nights; keeping himself up to the mark with copious draughts of black coffee.

Black coffee, the good old standby of the brain worker, is useful for stimulating the brain-machinery; but it is not the best thing in the world for renewing and building up the nerve and brain cells. As with all stimulants, there inevitably comes the reaction, when the great Universal Law demands repayment (as it does in the moral as well as in the physical world); a demand which always comes, seemingly, at the most

inopportune time and when we are least able to pay. Hence the ills that soul and body are subject to.

Now, Tracy took up his work with a new zest.

Most of the time he himself did not know now the story was going to end; for he could not always guess from the way the plot developed what the *denouement* and climax would be. All through his stories ran an undercurrent of moralizing which Cogan shied at, but which the readers enjoyed; and this unconventional style of his gave Tracy a reading public of his own, and who bought the magazine principally because of his tales. The circulation mounted steadily, making him a favored contributor with the publisher—the "boss," as Cogan, the editor, called him; a qualification the writer found of great value, inasmuch as he could always get money "on account" while he was writing the story.

Although Tracy worked as hard as any army mule, he never had any money! It seemed as if he could not save even a dollar for the proverbial rainy day, and he couldn't understand why. Other fellows who did not make as much as he did, had their six and eight cylinder machines, lived in high-priced apartments, belonged to expensive clubs, and travelled round with a high-toned, extravagant bunch while he was constantly on the ragged edge. He did not tumble to the fact that he did not know how to take care of number one—himself.

He had the foolish habit of shoving his hand into his pocket and giving what was generally his last dollar to anyone who asked for help. Not only was his pocket-book at the service of those who were in need, but also his valuable time. "Tracy's Home for Down

and Outs"—as his room was dubbed by his intimates—had the latch-string always hanging out with a welcome for all who needed a helping hand. He had a standing arrangement with a few of his patients—as as he humorously named them—who generally did not know where tomorrow's meals were coming from, to call on him for the wherewithal. If he did not happen to have the necessary dollar, he borrowed it from one of his artist friends who was in funds. Some of his more materially inclined acquaintances told him he was a poor business man, others advised him not to be so "easy," while some went still further and said he was a "sucker," a "plain damn fool;"—but Tracy only smiled.

He had an ambition all his own.

He wanted to be a Helper!

Intuitively, he was confident that to be a Helper on the spiritual planes of being, he first had to prove his worthiness by being a Helper on the Earth-plane. He guessed that in past time—in previous lives—he had thrown away his opportunities for spiritual growth, which was the reason for his present psychic limitations; therefore he contemptuously passed by most of the material things his fellows imagined spelled "success" as being of little or no value, and devoted his energies to developing his soul-powers.

As a consequence of his openhandedness, he frequently found himself in difficulties; more especially with his landlord. This man could not make out why it was that Tracy—making so much money, as he surmised—was always broke. With his worldly-wise acumen, he guessed that the writer was either a gambler

or—which was most likely as he was a bachelor—he was spending his money on women.

His monthly visits to the author being invariably met with the request to "come again in a day or so," the landlord finally came to the conclusion that it was time he put the screws on Tracy to make him pay his rent on the first of the month like other decent folk. He had more than enough trouble of that sort with his artist tenants, but as their studios brought in much higher rents than did the other rooms (because they had skylights), and could only be rented to other artists on account of the skylights being of no extra value to any other kind of tenant, he had to stand for a whole lot from that harum-scarem crew. With Tracy it was a different matter. His room could be rented to almost anybody, so the landlord was not obliged to humor his vagaries in the matter of rent.

The day on which Tracy's rent was due had come and gone five days ago; so the landlord thought the time had arrived to put his foot down.

The author was lying on his lounge, smoking his old corn-cob, and wondering when his unseen Helper would assist him with another plot. He needed one, and needed it badly. Hearing a knock on the door, he yelled "Come in!" The door opened, and the landlord walked in. He gazed with a frown at Tracy taking his ease when he ought to be working like other people; his notion of "work" being something done with the hands—something visible. "He's put in the night somewheres, I'll bet, and now he's resting up," was the clever deduction of the profiteer.

"Oh! Howdy do?" said Tracy lazily, when he saw

who his visitor was. "Again after the filthy lucre, I suppose—eh?"

"It's overdue a week now," the landlord announced stiffly.

The author yawned as he made a quick mental calculation.

"Not a week! Five days—to be precise," he replied.

"Well, that's five days too much, and I can't wait any longer! The rent is due on the first."

The author closed his eyes wondering which of his friends would be the most likely to strike for a loan of a few dollars to tide him over until he got another plot. The landlord took his action as meaning indifference, and it made him angry.

"You don't seem to worry about it very much, Mr. Tracy," he growled, frowning.

"Worry? Why should I worry, old chap?" Tracy replied with a twinkle in his eyes. "It's your worry, not mine."

"Oh! it is, huh? Well all I've got to say is: if the rent isn't in my office by six o'clock this evening, I want your room!"

"Now look here. I am awfully sorry to keep you waiting; but, hang it, you always seem to land here when the exchequer is high and dry. I am too good a tenant for you to chuck out, for you always get your money sooner or later; so you give me until noon tomorrow, and I'll see if I can scare up the money somewhere."

The irate landlord reflected that what the author said about his always getting the money, even if it was late, was true. He was honest, anyhow, even if he was

careless in money matters; and, who knew, perhaps the next tenant would be still worse. Lots of them failed to pay, and when he haled them to court, the scamps would give the magistrate some cock-and-bull story of the room needing decorating, or the plumbing was out of order and the room was not habitable, or the gas-pipes leaked and the landlord would not have them fixed,—the durned rips had more tricks up their sleeves than one could count in a year; and the end of it would be that he had to dispossess them,—which cost four dollars at least, and meant from five to ten days before he could get them thrown out. Even when he was successful in doing that, in some cases he had to pay the expense of the moving—in order to make room for the incoming tenant!

Landlords, like the rest of struggling humans, are alive to the fact that a bird in the hand is worth a whole covey in the woods, and this particular profiteer was no exception.

"Well . . . all right," he said, gruffly; "tomorrow noon. But I can't see why you can't come across with the rent on the first as well as on the seventh or fourteenth."

"Ah! There are lots of things you cannot see," Tracy retorted, with a significant nod. "We all have our limitations—unfortunately."

The landlord's fund of repartee was not equal to the occasion, so he gave vent to his feelings by shutting the door with a bang, and went to interview his next victim.

Tracy arose from his lounge, dreamily buttoning his vest, wondering if his credit was good enough with Cogan's boss to strike him for an advance. Hitherto,

he had been successful in getting money on account because he had submitted a synopsis of his proposed story; which, being O. K'd by Cogan, had served as an excuse for asking the favor. Now, in his present need, he was not so sure of being able to raise the wind, for he hadn't even the ghost of a plot—to say nothing of a synopsis—to submit. He grinned with amusement as he meditated on his dilemna.

"Well, Ikey, me old stick-in-the-mud,"—examining his small change to see if he had the necessary car-fare, "you are up against it this trip, for sure. You'll have to try to make bricks without straw, this time, me old chippie! Oh, well," he thought, putting on his coat, "perhaps some Moses will come along and take *me* out of the land of bondage. He will be more than welcome—a month's holiday camping out in the woods, and listening to the dickie birds would do me a lot of good."

He started on his journey downtown to interview the "boss."

When he had seated himself comfortably in the car, he opened the "extra" he had bought from a newsboy yelling, "*All about the shocking murder! Celebrated actor killed! Wuxtry! Wuxtry!*"

Taking in the flaring headlines at a glance, Tracy skimmed over the sensational and floridly written report, picking out the facts. His eye was arrested by a paragraph which said that the murderer, who was caught red-handed, was Jack Waller, the daring young aviator recently returned from France, the brother-in-law of the well-known editor of the *Manhattan Short Story Magazine*—Mr. Tom Cogan. Giving a whistle of surprise, his jaw dropped as he read the

words; for he perceived what a very inopportune time he had chosen to inflict *his* troubles on the editor —when the poor fellow had to bear this terrible blow.

"Gee whiz!" he muttered under his breath. "That is tough! Poor old Tom! Ten to one he won't be there today, now that this has happened."

But, as usual when he was in doubt of what his next step should be, he followed his "hunch"—as he called it. Instead of getting off the car, and trying to borrow money from one of his other friends, he felt that he ought to go to Cogan's office, if only to leave a message of sympathy for him.

Fortunately for Tracy (and, as the events following proved, fortunately for Cogan) the editor was in his office when Tracy arrived there. After calling to see Jack in his cell at the Police Station for a short half hour he had come up to the city; for there were some matters that demanded his editorial attention, and which could not be postponed. When he got to his office, he was greeted with expressions of sympathy; everybody in the place having heard the dreadful news.

His "boss"—the publisher—briefly intimated that he had read the account in the "extra" and noticing his careworn face, told him to let the sub-editor attend to everything possible, and to take the day off. He was kind enough to say, too, that whenever Cogan felt

disposed to tell him the inside details, he would find time to listen to them.

"You will need a lawyer, and a good one," the publisher said; "so, when you are ready to talk about it, let me know. I can put you next to a slick firm of lawyers. I don't know how you are fixed financially, but it is barely possible I can help you in that direction, too. Anyhow, if you want help of any sort, remember, you come to me . . . first!"

This coming from a man who had the reputation in the publishing trade of being as close as the bark on a tree, and about as cold-blooded in a business deal as one could find in a day's march, took Cogan completely off his feet. So far as his previous dealings with his boss were concerned, Cogan could honestly concur in the opinion current among magazine men; —which was that every time he handled a dollar, the eagle let out a scream of protest—he squeezed it so unmercifully!

He was so surprised at his employer's generosity, he looked at him in blank amazement.

The publisher's grim visage loosened into the semblance of a cracked smile when he saw Cogan's astonishment.

"I know the reputation I've got, Cogan, but sometimes the hardest shells have inside them the softest kernels. I meant what I told you just now, but . . . not necessarily for publication. My reputation of being a skinflint is, in a way, a sort of protection to me; like the birds and animals change their colors to match the ground they are on. Self-coloration I think they call it; don't they? Anyway, it acts the same in my case; so . . . . keep what I said to yourself."

Gulping down the lump in his throat, Cogan tried to stammer his thanks and appreciation for the proffered help, but his boss stopped him.

"Cut out the hurrah, Cogan; I don't want your thanks! You are Irish and I am a Jew; but I guess there isn't very much difference in the color of our blood after all."

The editor grabbed his employer's fat hand impulsively, and squeezed it so hard that the publisher looked ruefully at the marks his rings made on his soft flesh.

"Himmel!" he ejaculated, his face all puckered. "No wonder you Irishers are scrappers. Must have been a prize fighter in your family!"

For the first time in many years, Cogan's ready wit and speech failed him.

XXIV

When Tracy walked into the "boss'" room, the publisher had his work-a-day, hard facial expression in good working order. It was, as he had informed Cogan, his natural defence against his competitors and enemies, who would have been very much surprised to learn that the hard shell outside was not a true index of the real man inside, and sadly belied his real character.

His fight for a place in the sun had left its scars on his outside, but the inside man was overflowing with peace and goodwill to all men. Unknown even to his immediate relatives, he spent considerable sums of money in charity. He was the unknown founder of the "*Non-Sectarian Hospital for Children*" which was open to all children irrespective of creed, color, or race. His particular hobby was giving money to charitable organizations with the proviso that the donor's name would not be made public until after his death. In the moments when he knew his meditations would not be disturbed, he would put his feet on his desk, sit down deep in his chair—on the back of his neck, as the saying goes,—half close his eyes, and mentally go over the list of his many benefactions. He would chortle with an almost childish glee when he thought of the proviso he insisted on.

"Holy smokes, but that'll be rich! When they find out that the old skinflint, Abie Isaacs the fat Jew, is the man that's given 'em the dough!"—with a laugh that sounded like a corn-crake clearing its throat. "That the despised East Side 'kike' was big enough to help everybody—Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Christians as well as Infidels! Won't that be great? Shouldn't wonder but what they'll put up a monument for me, with my pretty face sculptured on it by one of their high-priced sculptors. Gee!"—the idea tickled him immensely—"I'll have to get a new picture of myself, nicely retouched, so as to look well on the monument."—And then he would rub his fat hands together, and shake his sides for joy.

A peculiar form of obsession, albeit one which could be imitated by the people who are so busy talking about charity that they have no time to practice it.

Friend Tracy, the author, stood ace high in his innermost heart. Not merely as a result of the increased circulation due to the popularity of his stories —as Cogan surmised, but because—first—he was glad to see that Tracy had the courage of his convictions, and was willing to stand or fall by them; secondly: he himself had studied deeply along the same lines, delving into the old Jewish Rabbinical literature which was full of this so-called *new* higher thought. He knew that the teaching of re-embodiment (called in these days, re-incarnation) was a fundamental teaching among the Jews; and, as he discovered later in his study of the subject, had been an accepted dogma for five centuries in the Early Christian Church. So Tracy's line of thought and ideas tickled him beyond expression. Not that he ever allowed the author

to guess for a moment that such was the case. Oh, no! That would not have been in keeping with the peculiar twist in his make-up of hiding his real feelings inside his own breast.

When the author entered the room to ask him for some money in advance, he found the publisher looking as sour and forbidding as ever.

"Hullo, Tracy," he greeted him gruffly; "what's biting you this morning?"

"Why . . . I need some cash in a hurry—got a sudden call on me—need it very badly," he reeled off.

"Huh! Must think we're made of money down here. What between the price of paper, and the inks going sky-high, and the printers wanting to be millionaires in a hurry, why . . . "

"Ye-eh, I know! I can repeat that little ditty backwards, forwards and sideways," said Tracy with a smile; "I have heard if often enough. Perhaps you would like to hear my song about how beans and coffee and rent and laundry and socks and tobacco have gone up in price."

"No, I know all about it! Anyway, I am busy this morning. How much is it this time?"

"Only fifty dollars; that's all," replied Tracy, airily.

"Huh!"—in mock astonishment. "Fifty dollars?"

"That's all. Letting you off easy this trip."

"Thats all? *Only* fifty dollars. Feefty thalers!" His face wrinkled grotesquely as he relapsed into the speech of his youth. "Mein Gott! What nerve-food are you taking now? I'd like to have some meinself —could use it in my peesness. Hmpf! Fifty dollars! Won't forty do? We're not so flush with money as you seem to think we are."

He peered through his thick glasses at the author. This sort of tilt was meat and drink to him, for he dearly loved bargaining. Also, he delighted to *camouflage* his real, generous nature with the hard exterior of the tight-fisted money grabber.

"No," replied Tracy, to whom this sort of thing was nothing new, "forty wouldn't go far enough; I need fifty."

"Well, if you need it as bad as all that, why . . . I s'pose we'll have to stretch a point; p'rhaps the bank will lend me some more money—to keep the bizness going. All right,"—with a deep sigh, "if you have a synopsis that Cogan says is O. K., I guess we can manage to let you have it . . . this time."

"Is Cogan here this morning?" the author asked, hardly believing his ears.

"Yeh, but he won't be here long. You'd better see him at once before he goes home."

Tracy thanked him, and left the office hurriedly. Running up the stairs to the next floor on which was the editorial room, he paused on the landing near the window, and tried to think of some excuse to give Cogan, and so win his assistance in raising the needed fifty.

As he gazed out over the canyon-like streets of lower New York, he felt the undefinable thrill, that always announced the proximity of his Helper, come over him. If his psychic sense of sight had been opened, he would have seen his Helper accompanied by Benton standing at his side.

A minute or so before, they had been in Cogan's office, where the Helper had shown Benton how the man he had collaborated with was now suffering from

the blow that had descended on him and his happy home. The actor was sincerely sorry, for he had taken a great liking to this big-hearted Irishman while working together on the play. Cogan was such a guileless, childish nature—the opposite from Benton—that the actor had grown to almost admire those qualities in the editor which he himself sorely lacked.

He responded splendidly to the Helper's suggestion that he should uncover the true facts of his murder, however distasteful the recital might be to him.

"Very well," agreed Benton; "but how am I to tell him? Will he hear me if I talk to him? You remember he couldn't hear me in the Police Station."

"No, you cannot make him hear. His psychic faculties are not developed sufficiently to receive your message."

"Then how is he to get it? How am I to tell him?"

"Outside, at the end of the corridor, is one of my many protégés; 'patients' I call them."

The actor looked at Him, surprised. "A patient, did you say?"

The Helper nodded. "He needs some help at this moment; so we can help him and Cogan at the same time."

"How can he get it any more than Cogan?"

"His psychic sight is not much further developed than Cogan's; but his psychic sense of hearing is very acute. He will get it almost word for word."

The next instant, the actor found himself at the side of Tracy who was looking dreamily out of the window, and strumming his fingers on the sill.

"Tell him briefly, the facts of your murder, and what led up to it" the Helper said.

With a deep feeling of shame, Benton hesitatingly started telling Tracy; giving him a brief outline of the events which culminated in the tragedy.

When the familiar thrill ran through him, Tracy searched in his pocket for paper and pencil. As Benton's words, delivered with all the actor's intuitive sense of the dramatic value of the various situations in the narrative, impinged on Tracy's psychic consciousness, the writer's face beamed with joy, and he jotted down in shorthand as rapidly as possible the skeleton synopsis of what promised to be a very strong and unusual story. When he came to the end, he instinctively gazed upward, and inwardly gave thanks for the help.

To his great amazement, Benton saw an exquisitely shaped pale-blue light emanate from Tracy and attach itself to him.

"Why . . . what is it?" he asked the Helper, wonderingly.

"That is the thanks *your* patient gives *you*, his helper!"

Benton was spellbound at the *spirituelle* beauty of the form hovering close to him; quivering like a thing of life; sending out sparks of tremulous living light.

"My!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "What a superb object! Perfectly gorgeous!"

"Some call them 'guardian angels,' for they keep off evil influences," the Helper explained. "A trifle more desirable than the *other* kind, is it not?"

Benton shuddered as he recalled to his mind the *other* kind.

"I don't know how I shall ever repay you for all the help you have given me," he said, gratefully.

"Life is a totally different thing to me—now."

"If you do not know, I'll tell you," replied the Helper. "Keep on as you have begun—*helping others.* If poor, suffering Humanity could only believe that that is the only way to find real, lasting happiness, Earth would soon become the Paradise it used to be. What a glorious consummation to work for! The Golden Age when Heaven and Earth will be as one world; and men knowing themselves to be Gods—not merely intellectual animals—with wide-open spiritual sight, working in harmony with the greater and higher Gods of other spheres to make the whole Universe one vast orchestra of praise to Him in Whom we live, move, and have our being! Man has not even glimpsed the glory, the power, the beauty of his future which will be attained only after æons of struggle. Let us, humble though our efforts be, do all we can to hasten the day of his attainment."

Tracy entered the editorial room to find Cogan at his desk; looking years older. He grasped his hand silently, and pressed it.

"You've heard all about it, I suppose," said the editor, wearily.

Tracy gave a nod. "Yes, and I need not tell you how sorry I am for you and your dear wife."

Cogan threw up his hands with a gesture of despair.

"I don't know in what way I can be of use to you in your trouble, old man, but if I can, please command

me. I know I am not of much use to anybody, but I am yours as far as my poor abilities go."

"Thanks, Tracy, old scout," Cogan replied sadly. "I am nearly distracted over the affair—at my wits' end. I ought to be chasing a lawyer at this very minute; but I've got to clear some of this truck first. How about my story, old man?"

"I've got the synopsis here—in shorthand. I'll read it to you. It will take only a few minutes, and it may help to take the other thing off your mind for the moment."

The editor leaned back in his chair, and listened while Tracy gave him the outline of the plot. When he had finished reading, Cogan with a sickly attempt at a smile asked.

"Say, old scout; is this another of your inspirations?"

The writer smiled indulgently. "You can laugh as much as you like, old chap, but"—a reminiscent look came into his eyes—"*it is!*"

"All right, old fellow. I don't care whether you think it is or not. It's darned good; and if you wish to help me, you'll do me a very real favor if you'll write that up to your usual standard. It will take that much load off my mind."

"You shall have it, old man. I'll do my best on it —I promise you!"

"I shall rely on your promise, so don't fail me. I'll give Ted, my sub: instructions to put it through if I don't happen to be here when you turn it in."

"You may depend on me," Tracy replied with a definite nod. "I'll put my best licks on it, Cogan."

He got his fifty dollars in advance, and hurried uptown to stave off his landlord, and start on his story.

*

Three days later, he turned in the completed story. When he entered the editorial room, he saw that Cogan's desk was closed.

"Hullo, Ted! How's tricks?" he greeted the sub-editor. "I see the big chief's not in."

"No, Mr. Tracy; and he may not be here for a couple of days. He is busy on his brother-in-law's case."

"Too bad! Too bad!" muttered the writer, shaking his head sorrowfully. "Well, the poor chap has got into the trouble, and now he must face the music!"—he referred to Jack Waller. "It seems a sad ending though for such a promising young fellow. Oh, this dreadful war! It is turning men back into brutes; going downward instead of upward."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the sub-editor. "Thousands of men who thought of nothing else but material pleasures, slowly but surely deteriorating their soul-fibre, by answering the call of duty—to fight for principles and ideals, for home and country—have awakened to higher things. At least, that is my view of it."

"May be so," said Tracy, doubtfully; "but why cannot men develop spiritually instead of all this bestial shedding of blood, and fighting like a pack of wolves?"

"Oh, well; so far as that is concerned, life itself is a battle—and a pretty fierce one."

"Yes . . . in a sense," agreed the writer; "but not with lethal weapons. Not with poison gas, shrapnel, bombs and bayonets!"

The sub-editor gave a snort of amusement. "Huh! I don't see very much difference between the methods of the battlefield and those of ordinary, everyday life."

"You don't?"

"No, I do not!" retorted the sub-editor, positively. "In warfare you have the spy to contend with, the man whom you trust as a friend, only to find that he has been spying on you, and discovering your weakness. In ordinary life, you take a man to your bosom as a friend, only to find that he abuses your friendship to further his own ends. You load him down with favors, lend him money, help him to his feet, only to discover that when he wins a footing and place, he passes you by, and probably repays your kindness by spreading false reports about you; returns your help with ingratitude."

"So you have had that experience, have you, Ted?" said the writer, a reminiscent look in his eyes.

"I know what I am talking about, believe me!" said the sub, bitterly. "And again. We are horrified to read of the 'Big Berthas' throwing a shell that wipes out a dozen or so soldiers, or the number of lives lost on the Lusitania, or the Armenian atrocities; but nothing much is said when 'Big Business' wipes out a lot of small competitors without the slightest compunction; that juggles the prices of food, and boosts them so high that thousands of poor mothers and

kiddies go through their miserable existence in a half-starved condition; and all because the miserly manipulators are greedy for more profits to swell their already full to bursting pocket-books! Talk of Belgium, and the poor starving people there! God! It hurts me to the quick every time I have to eat—thinking of those poor devils starving; but believe me, we have a Belgium right here in our own country! Men who don't care a continental how many suffer from want of clothes and food, so long as they pile up their ill-gotten gains. We protest against the brutal, 'kultured' Huns' malicious destruction of cathedrals and such-like; but we are not much interested in the poor people who live in the vile, dirty tenements belonging to one of our Church Corporations. The Huns destroy the temples and churches made by man; but our American Huns destroy the temples of the living God,—the people!"

"Are you a Socialist, or an Anarchist, or what?" inquired Tracy, rather taken aback at the sub-editor's outburst; so different from his usual light-hearted manner.

"I do not belong to any cult or society, and I don't bear a label of any sort whatever; but I am a man who tries to think for himself. Seeing all this abominable, selfish grabbing for things—which, I am glad to say, the grabbers will have to leave behind them—for years I wondered if there really was a Higher Power above us, ordering these things according to some plan that was unknown to us."

"Poor old Cogan would probably say that the ways of Providence are inscrutable; and that you shouldn't waste your time thinking about such things."

"Perhaps so, Mr. Tracy, but I am not built that way. Having a brain to think with, I believe it is my duty to use it on that problem, just as other men use their brains on other problems. If there is a law underlying the phenomena, I think it is our bounden duty to try to discover it."

"Have you made any headway?" the author asked. "You know, that sort of thing has occupied some of the greatest intellects of our humanity."

"Yes, I think I have made a great discovery! Indeed, two discoveries."

"That so?" said Tracy. "I am very much interested along those lines myself."

"Yes, of course. I know that from your stories. Well . . . a couple of years ago, I accompanied a friend to a gymnasium, where he went through exercises trying to put some muscle on his bones. Sitting there, watching him and about a dozen others going through their stunts, straining like horses at machines, or lifting heavy weights, the sweat running off them in streams, I caught myself wondering why they did it. What was the use of it all?"

"To build themselves up, of course," interrupted Tracy.

"Sure! But it struck me as being a shocking waste of time and energy, seeing that in a few short years their finely developed bodies would be food for worms, and that would be the end of them."

"Ah, yes! But is it the end of them?"

"Yeh, that was the sticker! The nigger in the woodpile! While I was thinking it over, something I had read when I was a kid came into my mind.

It had to do with punishments in vogue many years ago in the English Army."

"Yes? What was that?" asked the writer, on the alert for new data.

"When they ran up against a particularly hard nut of a man who couldn't be made to conform to the rules and regulations of the army by ordinary punishments, they used to take him out on the Parade ground, where, at one end, was a pile of the old-fashioned cannon balls built up in the form of a pyramid. His job was to take those heavy balls, one by one, from the pile, carry them to the other end of the parade ground, and build them up in a pyramid."

"To tire him out, eh?"

"As soon as he had built up the new pile, he had to take them, one by one, and rebuild them on the spot from which he had taken them. They kept him at that pulling down and rebuilding until he broke down."

"Great Scott! Why, that would be enough to drive a man crazy! What was the idea?"

"The idea back of the punishment was: the man was doing something that *he knew was absolutely useless, and absolutely barren of results!*".

Tracy gave a wise nod as he caught the point of the illustration.

"I see! And what was the result of your . . er . . . ratiocination?"

"Well . . . I figured that if what we were doing—struggling and suffering—had no reason, no design, no great scheme back of it all, we were the victims of one of the most damnable jokes that was ever perpetrated by the most devilish fiend from the bottom-

less pit! It would be the same thing that the English soldier was up against, only on a much larger scale."

"Yes . . . a fair inference, I think," replied Tracy.

"I figured out," the sub-editor went on, "that as from the smallest bits of life right up to the planets and suns there was evidence of most marvellous designing, a most clever adjustment of the lives to their environment, there logically must be a Designer somewhere back of the design; but so infinitely beyond our comprehension that it was but a waste of time, at our stage of the game, to even try to find out *what* IT is."

"Something like a microbe on the Washington monument guessing as to the builder of it. Yes, I agree with you. But was that as far as you got?"

"No, I went a step farther. I arrived at the conviction that just as the athlete needed the various paraphernalia to develop his muscles, so the real, inner man—whom I concluded was a spirit, and not merely a set of bones and muscles,—the spiritual athlete developed his spiritual attributes and his spiritual strength by struggling with, and straining against, the forces of evil and darkness; for, evidently, our real home isn't here on earth, but in some spiritual world."

"You are to be congratulated on getting that far. That was a discovery well worth making," said Tracy. "What was the other?"

The sub-editor laughed as he recalled the incident.

"I got good and hot under the collar one day in the boss' office downstairs, and in the course of my heated remarks aired a few of my convictions."

"Which was like talking Greek or Choctaw to the old man!"

"On the contrary! I was never more flabbergasted in my life! I fully expected to get the bounce, p. d. q. but instead, the boss said, 'Are you interested along those lines of research?' Just fancy the old man using decent English! The first time I ever heard him not maltreat the language. Well . . . I told him I was interested; very much so. I tell you, I expected to get notice to quit right there and then; but no! He smiled that cracked smile of his and said he would like to see me the next day."

Tracy was all ears, and brimming with curiosity.

"The next day he came up here, and handed me a book—one of his own, and told me to read it carefully, and if I wanted more of the same sort to let him know. Well . . . to make a long story short, I have been devouring his books ever since; and believe muh, he's got some library!"

"You astound me! I shouldn't have thought it of him. Well, well! But say, speaking of stories. Gee! I was forgetting all about it! Here is the one I promised Cogan. I think you will enjoy it."

He handed the manuscript to the sub-editor.

"Is it up to your usual?"

"It's better!" replied Tracy, enthusiastically. "I think it is the best I've ever written."

"If that's the case, I'll skim through it and pass it on to the printer. Those were my instructions from the chief."

"All right, Ted," replied the author. "Well, I am glad to have had this little chat with you, because I like to meet people who are thinking for themselves,

and especially along those lines. Now I must be going. I have so much to do, I hardly know where to begin; so—good bye."

All the way down in the elevator, Tracy chuckled to himself at the thought that "old skinflint Isaacs" was interested in spiritual matters. "What do you know about that? The old son of a gun!" he muttered, grinning quietly. "I'd never have guessed it. Well . . . 'Judge not'," he quoted, "for one never knows!"

XXV

Of the wearisome, soul-racking torture that Cogan and his wife went through during the weeks previous to the trial, one who is in the position of a mere onlooker cannot fully know or rightly estimate; and, supposing he could, an attempt to describe it in words would meet with failure. There are emotions of the soul so sacred, so intimate, so much the private property of the one experiencing them, it were a sacrilege to uncover them in their nakedness to the gaze of the unsympathetic, curiosity-seeking multitude. There are some things no callous hand may touch, no irreverent eye may see; things that belong to the holy of holies within us, and on which no judgment may be passed except by Him who, seeing all, understands and forgiveth much.

The one who should have felt the most concern—Jack Waller—felt the strain the least of all, apparently. He was a mystery to his brother-in-law, the lawyer, and also to the alienist who had been called in to help the defence.

When Cogan talked to the alienist regarding Jack's calm indifference about the outcome of the affair—with its dreadful possibilities, the M. D. went deeply into what were the probable causes. His exposition bristled with the technical terminology of psychology and

psycho-pathology; most of which the editor had not even heard of before. Quoting copiously from Prince, Freud, Janet, Sidis, and other authorities on the subject, he spoke learnedly of "dissociative and multiple personality," "libido," "hysteria," "neurasthenic states," hallucinations, lines of cleavage, planes of consciousness, psycho-analysis and a lot of other big-mouthed, loud-sounding terms and phrases which pass current as word of golden wisdom with those who seek the origin of soul-life in the material, physical envelope.

Divested of its glittering word-play, and boiled down to its essentials, his solution in plain words was: Jack's brain cells had broken down under the strain of his experiences in the war, and he was, therefore, suffering from temporary insanity.

"I see," said Cogan. "In other words, he had what the ordinary man calls a 'brain-storm.' "

The alienist looked at him with an air of disappointment.

"Well . . . yes . . . I suppose that is what the *ordinary* man would probably call it."

The stress on the word "ordinary" was full of contempt. All his exhaustive and learned explanation had been thrown away and wasted on the editor. What was the use of having all those ponderous phrases and weighty quotations at his fingers' ends if his audience did not appreciate his erudition at its proper value, but preferred the colloquial vulgarism "brain-storm?"

When the alienist laboriously went over the same ground with the principal lawyer whom Cogan had engaged—through the kind offices of his boss—to

take charge of the case, Mr. Rudin—the lawyer—turned to the editor to say:

"Mr. Cogan, I think that is by far the best defence we can put up. In fact, in my opinion, it is the only one!"

"The only one? I take it you mean to use it in conjunction with the incident of the shooting at the cats."

The lawyer shook his head positively. "I guess we will forget all about those cats." He laughed.

The editor stared at him in surprise. "Do you mean that you will not use that incident? Why . . ."

"What you say about it may be true, Cogan," interrupted the lawyer; "but that cat story is too thin!"

"But damn it, Mr. Rudin, it is true!" Cogan insisted with some heat. "And you want the truth in a court of law, don't you?"

"Yes indeed we do—frequently," the lawyer conceded, smiling; "but we don't often get it, I am sorry to say."

The editor gave a gesture of impatience.

"Now you listen to me, Mr. Cogan," said the lawyer. "I am a lawyer, and even my worst enemies will admit that I know my business. For the sake of argument, we will admit that the story of your brother-in-law firing at the cats on the fence is true in every detail; but . . . and it is a big 'but' . . . I tell you frankly, the jury would not believe it! There are times, even in a court of justice, when the truth does more harm than good."

The alienist stroked his beard and smiled reminiscently as he turned to look out of the window. Not

so many moons ago, he had been the star witness in two separate trials of the same murder case, and in which he had played the part of what amounted to a dual personality. In the first trial, he had been the prop of the prosecuting attorney; whereas, in the second, he had used his wealth of information relating to psycho-pathology on the side of the defence. The editor's innocence of legal procedure, and the status of the blind-folded lady who was supposed to rule over a court of justice rather amused and bored him. He might be an authority on things pertaining to the editing of magazines, but it was palpably evident that he knew precious little of how justice was administered in New York City.

"I'll tell you this, Cogan," stated Rudin, the lawyer, impressively. "Judging from the interviews I have had with your brother-in-law, what the doctor has said is not only the best plea to set up, and therefore the best defence, but is really the true state of affairs."

"Do you mean to say . . . " began Cogan.

"I mean to say," continued Rudin, "that he is, right now, deranged if not wholly insane!"

"What reason have you for forming such an amazing opinion?"

"Why . . . when I talked sensibly to him, trying to get him down to brass tacks—to the facts of the matter, he looked at me with a sort of pitying expression, and chucked a lot of Scriptural quotations at me! I told him, one morning I was there, that while the 'Lord is my Shepherd' business and all that sort of thing might be very comforting to him—to keep his courage up, it wasn't worth a whoop as a

legal defence for murder; it was darned poor stuff on which to build an argument to convince a jury that he was innocent."

"What did he say to that?" said the alienist, mildly interested.

"He didn't say a blamed word, but looked up at the ceiling, and smiled a silly sort of smile; then nodded knowingly as if he could see something up there. Oh, he is nutty, all right! Take it from me."

"And of course," the alienist urged smoothly, "those little aberrations could be used to buttress up the claim that he is insane."

Cogan didn't exactly know what to think! He had grave suspicions that such was the case, but disliked to harbor the thoughts; in a way, they seemed to savor of disloyalty to his brother-in-law. He remembered what his wife had told him of an experience she had had with Jack in his cell only a week previous, which was somewhat similar to that of the lawyer's.

As Mrs. Cogan did not tell her husband *all* that occurred on that occasion, perhaps it is as well—for the sake of the completeness of the narrative—that the full account should now be given.

It happened on one of her visits to her brother. Sitting beside him on the cot, she was sobbing her heart out while he was trying to comfort her.

"Well now, Jack," she said, between her sobs; "I'm going to tell you all about it."

"Never mind, Kitty," he answered soothingly; "what is the good of crying over spilt milk? What's done is done; and the best thing to do now is to learn

whatever lesson there is to be gained from it, and strive to do better—next time."

"But I'll feel better if I tell you, Jack," she persisted.

He saw that she was determined in her purpose to tell him, so to please her he listened to her recital with set face and closed eyes.

"When I was a student at the Dramatic School, he visited there once a month as a sort of critic—listening to the pupils declaiming, and watching them act. Then he would give us advice and criticism . . . He invited me to his studio; and I, not suspecting anything out of the way, went . . . He gave me private lessons, gratis—he would not hear of my paying—and he would sometimes write short notes giving me hints and pointers which he said he had forgotten when I was in his studio. Of course, I wrote letters in reply, thanking him for his kindness . . . I was only an emotional, stage-struck girl at the time, without much knowledge of the world, and I thought his doing all that for an unknown girl—giving me lessons and those hints—was perfectly splendid of him—I was quite overwhelmed with his kindness, and . . . well . . I guess I gushed and slobbered a lot over him . . . in my letters, I mean . . . I liked to write letters in those days, and whenever I had a pen in my hand, I used to write reams on reams, just letting my emotions run away with me. They were perfectly harmless, that I am positive of because—well, because I knew of nothing else; my dreams and thoughts were as pure as a child's; I was little better than a child, anyway, so far as knowledge of evil was concerned. The letters were as harmless as a child's, but to those

who didn't know how innocent I was of such matters, an evil construction could be put on my words."

Her brother opened his eyes, and, putting his hands on her shoulders, looked searchingly at her.

"Was there anything serious, anything wrong between you and him? Tell me the truth now, Kitty!"

"I swear, as God is my judge," she replied, shaking her head strenuously, "there was absolutely nothing but friendship! Absolutely nothing! He insulted me, one day, in his studio, and I was so shocked, I refused to see him again . . . I never went to his studio again, and always stayed away from the School when he visited there, but . . . he kept my letters."

Her brother's set face relaxed. "Oh! Thank God for that!" he murmured.

He smiled grimly as he recalled the scene in the parlor—Benton pointing threateningly at the letters, and his sister's trepidation. The whole affair was now plain and clear to him. His sister watched the smile come into his face—wondering.

"Well since you have nothing on that score to reproach yourself with, you shouldn't worry about it."

"Yes . . . but Jack . . . what is to become of you? Really, I . . . am the . . . guilty . . ."

Her brother quickly covered her mouth with his hand, and glanced hastily toward the cell door where an officer was standing.

"You must do as I tell you, Kitty!" he commanded in a harsh tone. *Say absolutely nothing!* You have your *child* to think of! Do you wish to damn the rest of his life? Do you wish him, when he grows up, to curse his own mother for bringing that shame on him? Every time you waver, think of your child—and the

possibility of his cursing you. Now you promised me before; please keep your promise."

He stood up as he spoke, and looked at her with a severe countenance.

"But you, Jack! What of you?" she whispered, her voice trembling.

He looked upward, drew a deep breath, and smiled as though he saw a heavenly vision;—that which no words could utter.

"In a way," he said, slowly and dreamily, "I am not sorry this has happened; for I have learned more of *real* things in the few weeks I've been in this cell than I ever expected to know in this life." He drew himself up to his full height. "Yes!"—with a look of gladness in his face—"'There *is* a Divinity that shapes our ends; rough-hew them how we may!' and though I walk through the Shadow of the Valley of Death, I will fear no evil; for—the Lord is my Shepherd." He patted her shoulder gently. "I am in safe hands, Kitty, and everything will be all right!"

His exaltation seemed to be communicated to her as she gazed at his beaming face in awe. She sank to her knees, seized his hand convulsively, and covered it with hot tears and passionate kisses.

Her husband who had been told only of the latter part of the incident for the moment thought of recounting it to the lawyer and alienist, but he thought it best to be silent.

'What's the use?'—he thought. 'It would make them all the more positive in their belief that he was crazy. Poor old Jack!'

So—it was determined by the lawyer, as the one responsible for the successful issue of the case, that

the line of defence would be "temporary insanity;" and he secretly hoped that Jack would, at the trial, throw some of that "religious guff"—as he termed it—at the jury. It would go far to make it plain to the jurymen that the poor chap really had a few screws loose.

❧

One thing, however, bothered the lawyer, and kept him awake of nights.

The judge who was to try the case was a man of a hard, forbidding face; his head covered with closely cropped hair like a prize-fighter's. He took a keen delight in professing ignorance of slang words in common use, and would turn with a bland look of innocence to ask the counsel to translate the colloquialism into more or less classical English. His pose, when it did not irritate, amused the counsel who happened to be the victim of his pretended ignorance; for it was common knowledge that the honorable judge was one of the worst old "rounders" in the city; that precious few prize-fights were pulled off, and few horse races run without him being there to grace the occasion with his presence. There were dark rumors and knowing hints flying about of pleasures less innocent than these; orgies—not reported in the daily newspapers, but well known to those of the underworld—at which he was usually an honored guest, if not indeed the star performer. His assumption of ignorance of that on which he was a recognized authority and past master,

was, to those who knew the facts, little short of grotesque.

As with most men in his position, a sobriquet had been tacked on him. He was called the "hanging judge!" for he had scant mercy to show the prisoner who was unfortunate enough to be tried by him.

And he was the judge slated to preside at Jack's trial!

Whenever he thought of it—and it occupied his mind constantly—the lawyer shook his head ominously.

"He has about one chance in a hundred with that darned old rip!" he admitted dolefully to the alienist. "About as much chance as a mouse in a cat's claws!"

Two days before the trial, however, something happened which changed the lawyer's tune to one of hopeful delight. It really seemed as if some other Power had stepped in to help Jack, for the glad news—glad to Rudin, the lawyer, if not to the judge—was published that the "hanging Judge" had suddenly been taken ill with complications.

The truth was: he had been taken home—drunk as a lord—from one of his revels in a taxi-cab, and had offered the driver a string of choice gutter oaths in lieu of his proper fare. The taxi-driver who did not know—and would not have cared if he had known—that his voluble passenger was Judge J—, had himself graduated from the gutter school, and was, therefore, at home in the verbal nuances of its speech. He staggered the honorable judge with his fluency in that respect; and, what was more to the point (and also to the enjoyment of those who heard of the facts later on), partly sobered the legal luminary by "hang-

ing a few" good punches on the gentleman's rubicund visage, and presenting him with a pair of "shiners"—two black eyes—which swelled up so that his beauty and sight were marred for the time being.

Hence the announcement of his "illness," which was a good excuse for His Honor's disinclination to appear in public, and to advertise the fact that, for once, he who was so fond of holding up to ridicule those who pleaded before him in his court, had met his match, and that the joke was on him.

"My! but that's good news!" cried the lawyer when he heard it. "Now we shall have old Hargrove to try the case, and we are lucky to get him; for like all old men he leans to the accused, and gives him the benefit of the doubt as much as possible in his charge to the jury."

XXVI

On the opening day of the trial, it was noticed that Judge Hargrove was not only old, but seemed to be in very poor health. It was discovered afterwards that he had asked the Prosecuting Attorney to make it as easy for him as possible as he was not feeling very "spry;" and said that this was the last court he would preside over as he intended retiring from the bench.

The trial opened with the usual preliminaries of choosing the jurymen. Rudin, the lawyer for the defence, challenged only one man,—one who had never met the prisoner, but confessed to being biased against him because of his part in the war; the objector being a pacifist of the type that Nature sometimes turns out when she produces an object that is neither fish, fowl, nor good-red-herring. The man who filled his place had no bias one way or the other, and was open to argument.

On the second day, when all the jurymen were chosen, the court-house was jammed to the doors by persons who were attracted to the trial for very different reasons. There was a large number of the local towns-people present, anxious to see the prisoner acquitted because their sympathies went out to him and the Cogans; but the greater number were persons

belonging to the theatrical profession, and the "half-world" who, like buzzards, scented something unsavoury, and wanted to hear the incidents that might be uncovered in the evidence but which could not be printed in the newspapers.

All the big metropolitan dailies, of course, had their star reporters on the job; special writers, "sob-sisters" to write up the harrowing details of the deceased actor's private life with a view to drawing the inevitable moral,—for it was suspected that the hidden motive for the killing had something to do with a woman; and numerous artists to enliven the reports with sketches "made on the spot" of everybody and everything connected with the case.

Outside the court-house, the street was a solid mass of automobiles of all descriptions, from broken-down taxis to flashy racing cars and elegant limousines; the last named belonging to members of the motion picture industry who were there to get new "dope" for scenes in moving picture plays.

Cogan, the editor, was the principal witness. Under the skillful questioning of his counsel, he told how he had made the acquaintance of Benton; of the many enjoyable hours they had spent together working on his play; the getting of the telephone message announcing the finding of his dead body, and the arrest of Jack.

Giving a straight-forward account, telling his story

with such evident good feeling for the deceased actor, and sorrow for his sudden taking off, the impression he left on the minds of the jury and audience was very favorable. It was evident that Cogan had more to lose than gain by Benton's death. Under the gruelling cross-examination by the Prosecutor, he went to pieces.

Happening to mention the incident of the cats and the racket they made on the fatal evening, he was led to give information relating to Jack's remark (that he would "take a shot at them if he had his gun"), and of his (Cogan's) handing out his own revolver to Jack, which, later in the evening, was found in Jack's pocket.

"You say the cats annoyed you, Mr. Cogan," said the Prosecutor. "Of course we all know that a cats' concert isn't the most musical thing in the world, and is somewhat of a nuisance at the best of times—especially when one wants to sleep; but why should the prisoner or you want to kill the cats, seeing that it was early in the evening. If it had been very late at night, it might have been excusable."

"I had been for several weeks working at high pressure at my professional duties, and I have suffered for years from insomnia. Only a few nights before, when I was unable to get to sleep, a couple of cats kept up such an infernal racket that I was a wreck the next morning from want of sleep."

"Yes, Mr. Cogan. Kindly continue."

"On this particular day, things had gone all wrong in my office, and in consequence, I was in a very nervous, irritable state. When I heard those cats start in again, I thought I should go crazy."

"So what did you do, Mr. Cogan?"

"I opened the window of my study to see if I could frighten them away; I saw my brother-in-law . . ."

"The prisoner at the bar?" inquired the Prosecutor.

The editor nodded and continued: "Yes . . . walking up and down the lawn. I asked him to scare them off, and he . . er . . ."

"What did he?" . . . " The Prosecutor did not finish the question.

"He said that if he had his gun, he would take a pot-shot at them."

"Did he wish to shoot them merely to keep his hand in, as it were, or . . . "

"No-o. He said that he had it in for them because they had kept him awake the night previous."

"Oh! They had kept *him* awake! Did they keep you awake, too? On that particular night?"

"No-o"—he answered with some hesitation—"they didn't. I . . . didn't hear them at all that night."

"You didn't? Although you were troubled with insomnia!" The Prosecutor shot a meaning glance at the jurymen as he asked the question.

Cogan shook his head in the negative.

"Well—what did you do when the prisoner said that?"

"I suddenly remembered that my revolver was lying in the drawer of my desk; so I got it out and handed it to him . . . I told him to take a shot at the cats, then I closed the window."

"And then—what?"

"I heard a shot, and the cats' noise stopped."

"Then I presume you opened the window so that he could return the gun to you."

"No, I didn't."

"No? How did he return the gun to you?"

"He didn't return it."

"He didn't?"

"No."

"Did you not think that was strange?"

"Why—no; I forgot all about it."

"You forgot all about his having the revolver?"

"Yes . . . Mr. Benton jokingly commented on my nervous state, and told me a story which made us both laugh, and—I forgot the revolver."

"Hm. What was the story, Mr. Cogan? Can you remember it?"

"Ah—well—no, I am sorry to say that I cannot," was the reply. "I really forget what it was."

"Cannot you remember what the story was about?"

The editor gave a nervous laugh. "I haven't the slightest idea now what the subject of the story was . . I am sorry."

"Seems strange that with your really excellent memory for *some* of the details, you cannot remember even what it was about."

Addressing his remark more to the jurymen than to the witness, the Prosecutor smiled cynically as he leaned against the jury-box.

"It may seem strange, but it is the truth, nevertheless!" the editor replied with a flash of temper.

"You remember the *cats' story* very well, indeed, but cannot remember a *funny* story," said the Prosecutor with a touch of sarcasm.

He looked at the jurymen to see if they caught his point. The editor's recital of the incident of the cats evidently appealed to their sense of the ludicrous, and

they showed by their expressions that they felt their intelligence was being trifled with; most of them having a smile of regret on their faces, while some frowned at what they considered Cogan's foolishness —if not impudence—of telling the idiotic yarn and expecting them to believe it!

"So you did not see the revolver again until it was shown to you at the Police Station after the murder?"

"No. I did not."

"How many shots did the prisoner fire at the . . er . . . *cats?* Can you remember *that* little detail, Mr. Cogan?"

"One!"

"Are you positive that only *one* shot was fired? Careful now!"

"Only one!" declared the editor, positively.

"Are you aware that *two chambers* were empty when the weapon was found on the prisoner?"

"I can explain that. I—" began Cogan.

"Was that other one fired at a—*cat?*" the Prosecutor asked.

The editor flushed with anger. "No! It was not! When I loaded the gun, I discovered that the last cartridge was defective; the rim was abraded, and it would not go in the chamber."

"Did you ever have that happen before? Did you ever find a cartridge defective in the same way that that particular one was?"

"No, never!"

"What did you do with the defective cartridge? Send it back to the makers—or what?"

"I really forget! . . . I have a hazy recollection of

putting it on my desk, intending to send it back to the dealers from whom I bought it; but, really, I don't know what became of it!"

"Haven't you seen it since?" the Prosecutor said incredulously.

"No, I have not."

The Prosecutor looked across at the jury, and, raising his eyebrows meaningly, smiled broadly.

"Do you sit at that desk very often?" he asked.

"Practically every night—doing something or other in the form of writing."

"And you have never seen that cartridge since; from that time to this!"

"No, sir; I have not."

The Prosecutor rested his chin on his hand, as if in deep thought, and shook his head slowly. "Hm, hm! I wonder! I wonder . . . whether those cats . . . perhaps they walked away with it!" he said in a loud aside to the jury.

As Cogan's lawyer had predicted: the relation of the cats' incident did the case for the defence more harm than good. It was too commonplace to be accepted as truth!

"Mr. Cogan," the Prosecutor continued, turning to the witness, "you have told the Court how much you liked Mr. Benton personally; how enjoyable his society was, and how sorry you felt on hearing of his death."

The editor gravely nodded his head affirmatively.

"To what extent did your brother-in-law share your enjoyment of Mr. Benton's society?"

Cogan flushed at the question, and shot a quick glance at Jack sitting with folded arms and closed

eyes. "My brother-in-law did not like Mr. Benton . . . He didn't want to know him or meet him."

"Do you know *why* he did not like him?"

Cogan hesitated a moment, then proceeded to relate what Benton had told him regarding the encounter on board ship; also of Jack's anger on meeting the actor in his (Cogan's) house.

"Did your brother-in-law say or do anything in particular on that occasion? When he met Mr. Benton in your house?"

"He said he did not like him, and refused to shake hands with him . . . I tried to induce him to change his mind, but . . . "

"Do you remember your brother-in-law saying, on that occasion, anything about shooting Benton?"

The question was merely a feeler, but it electrified the jurors and audience! All waited eagerly for the reply. Cogan was manifestly very much distressed. He glanced at his counsel, who was chewing nervously on his moustache, for guidance. The Prosecutor saw he had, unwittingly, struck on the right clue.

"Never mind the counsel for the defence," he shouted, waving his hand. "Please answer the question."

The editor glanced at Jack who was looking serenely at him. When their eyes met, Jack's nostrils dilated and his lips set tightly as he nodded quickly, motioning to Cogan to tell the facts.

Cogan passed the end of his tongue over his dry lips nervously. "He said—that he would as soon—put a—bullet in his—dirty hide—as talk to him," he stated in a husky voice.

"Ah! Thank you, Mr. Cogan,"—the Prosecutor indicated that he had finished his cross-examination.

The editor was coming off the witness stand, when Jack leaned over to his counsel and asked dryly: "Don't you think it would be well to ask Cogan *why* I said that?"

Rudin, his lawyer, was on his feet instantly! Motioning to Cogan to keep his seat on the stand, he asked: "Did your brother-in-law give you any reason for saying that he would as soon put a bullet in his hide as to talk to him?"

"Yes. He did," answered Cogan.

"Ha! Well, let us have it! Kindly tell the Court what that reason was."

"On board the liner, the evening before landing, Mr. Benton was half drunk, and said something Mr. Waller resented."

All in the court-room leaned forward to listen intently; this, evidently, was the motive behind the killing.

"What was it Mr. Benton said on that occasion that your brother-in-law objected to?"

"He spoke lightly of women's virtue. Made coarse, vile remarks about women in general."

"And what did Mr. Waller do?"

"He would not discuss the matter with me; but since, I have spoken to some of the officers belonging to the ship. They told me Mr. Waller struck Benton. They fought, and Benton was knocked out."

"Good! Serve him right!" came from one of the women in the front seat.

The judge smiled wearily and rapped for order.

"And was that the reason Mr. Waller refused to shake hands with Benton at your house?"

"Yes, sir. He said Benton was poisonous; and that he would not have him in *his* house."

"Showed his sense!" came from a feminine voice.

The judge looked severely at the group of women from whence the comment came, and shook his head slowly in warning.

"Just a moment, Mr. Cogan," said the Prosecutor when Rudin was through with the witness; "I want to ask you a question. Was any particular woman's name mentioned on the occasion of the fight on the ship?"

"Not that I know of, sir. So far as my information goes, his remarks applied to women in general," answered Cogan.

The answers to the questions made a great impression on the audience; for the *motive* had not yet been uncovered. Because Benton had spoken of women in general was no reason why a man should take it upon himself to kill the scamp. The knowing ones in the court-room opined that there must have been some jealousy under it all; that, in all probabilty, the actor had some particular woman—whom Waller knew, perhaps loved—in his mind, which gave point to his scurrilous remarks. *But who was the woman?* That was what they would like to know! Those who knew Jack, especially the women, started clapping their hands when Cogan told the reason of Jack's dislike of Benton. The demonstration was quickly stopped by the court officer; but it showed sympathy for the accused, and, possibly had some effect on the jury.

The Cogans' servant girl was put on the stand by

the Prosecuting Attorney, but as she swore that all she knew of Jack was to his credit—"a perfect gentleman," as she put it, and that she had heard absolutely nothing about shooting Benton or anyone else, her testimony did not add anything to the strength of the case for the State.

The damning evidence was, of course, that of the Prosecutor, his chauffeur, and Mr. Warren; all of whom had arrived on the scene of the murder and found Jack there, bareheaded and with the revolver in his pocket. As the place was less than half a mile from Cogans' house, the fact of Jack being without his hat, and breathing rapidly as if he had run after Benton (which he had), pointed with no uncertain finger at him as the perpetrator of what was—in the Prosecutor's opinion—a cold-blooded, premeditated murder.

The fact, too, that both the alienist and the lawyer for the defence laid such great stress on the terrific nervous strain of the war as being a probable cause, implied that they themselves were in no doubt about him being the guilty one.

Mrs. Cogan not having been called as a witness (following the expressed wish and command of Jack, who was afraid that her emotionalism would carry her away), she had been prevailed upon not to attend the trial. She stayed at home with her boy, Harold, trying to keep his mind off his Uncle Jack—while she could think of no one else. It was a heart-breaking time for her!

Not to weary the reader with all the monotonous procedure of the examination and cross-examination of the various friends and acquaintances of Jack who

had been called to testify to his honorable career, his uprightness, his courage, his ideality and high principles, let it suffice to say that no "hidden motive" was found, no particular woman's name brought into the case, no evidence of any kind to offset what appeared to be the facts.

When the judge commenced his charge to the jury, it was remarked that he spoke with deep feeling and great solemnity. In the light of what happened later on, some of his remarks may be found interesting.

". . . The power is put into your hands," he said, addressing the jury, "of saying whether the prisoner at the bar is guilty or not guilty; to suffer the penalty demanded by the law, or—to go free . . . You have listened to the testimony of those who have known the accused for a short and also for a long time; persons who have testified to that which is, in my opinion, the most valuable asset a man can possess, namely: *character*; and while that testimony may be biased in favor of the accused, nevertheless, it should have some weight with you in arriving at your decision. And for this reason: No evidence has been brought forward to show that the splendid tributes to the accused are undeserved. His fine qualities, high-mindedness, and the attributes of that much abused term—'gentleman'—are conceded him, without anything to show the opposite. You may think that that is a poor defence for an accused man to lean on;

but in my humble opinion, a man's character is his best defence; for it mirrors forth the man's thoughts and actions, and informs us as to what the man inside really is. Strip a man of his good name, and—what remains? You all know the old adage: 'Give a dog a bad name—you may as well hang him!' If that can be said of an animal, how much more significant it is when said of a man made in the image of his Maker! Again, I would direct your attention to the fact that *all the evidence against the accused is circumstantial!* Any man with warm blood in his veins might stroll out of a garden and on to the road for a short distance, especially if the night be an inviting one; and, as the defence states, the accused heard the shot, and ran in the direction of the sound. What would be more natural than for him to bend over to see what ailed the man on the ground? The fact that *a* weapon was found in the accused man's pocket is not, *necessarily*, conclusive. One of the witnesses for the defence—the prisoner's brother-in-law, stated that he closed the window after giving the revolver with which to scare the cats away. What more natural than that the accused, who is a soldier used to handling a gun as casually as the ordinary man handles a pocket-knife, should slip it into his pocket, rather than run the risk of meeting the man he despised—and rightly, too, I think—by returning the gun to his brother-in-law—Mr. Cogan—who was in the same room as Benton . . . I lay stress on all these things, because human nature is inclined to jump to conclusions. *Because* the accused was found at the spot of the crime: *because* a revolver was found in his pocket, does not *necessarily prove* him to be the one guilty of that crime.

I would have you think seriously of all these considerations, for life is a very sacred thing, and should not be lightly taken away."

When the jurors filed out to deliberate on their verdict, the Prosecutor leaned over to Jack's lawyer.

"Say, Rudin, if your client doesn't get off scot-free, you won't be able to blame the old man! One should imagine he was the counsel for the defence, not the judge. I never heard anything more one-sided in all my life!"

"Well, I hope you don't feel very badly about it; do you?" said Rudin with a grin of satisfaction. He certainly had no fault to find with the judge's summing up.

"Between you and me, I should be glad to see him free," the Prosecutor admitted. "I would be the first to congratulate him; for I think the world is well rid of a skunk!"

The counsel for the defence smiled. "We will hope for the best, Clark."

"Do you know what I think, Rudin?" the Prosecutor said with a sly look.

Rudin looked inquiringly at him. "I don't."

"I think he is shielding somebody. Some woman!" He looked knowingly at Rudin.

"Not that I am aware of; 'pon my honor," replied Rudin.

The other looked quizzingly at Rudin through his half-closed eyes, and shrugged his shoulders as he gathered his papers together—for the court at that moment was adjourned.

XXVII

Mrs. Cogan sat at the side of her husband when the jurymen filed in. She had insisted on being present; and although Cogan did his best to persuade her not to attend, she had her way.

"Which do you prefer me to go to?" she asked him. "To go to the court-room, or to the insane asylum? Because that is where I'll land if I have to stay here in the house!" The unconscious Irish bull was lost on her husband, but he allowed her to override all his objections.

The court-room was tense with suppressed excitement. Everyone was prepared to give Jack Waller an ovation—expecting an acquittal.

A hush fell over the room when the judge asked:

"Mr. Foreman, have you agreed on your verdict?"

"Your Honor, we find the accused guilty of manslaughter! In consideration of the high character the accused has hitherto borne, we strongly recommend clemency."

The verdict came as a great shock to those in the room; especially as the judge had shown himself so biased in favor of the prisoner. Nothing less than a verdict of "Not Guilty" had been expected. Apparently, the circumstantial evidence had been too much for the jurors.

When the full meaning of the words percolated through Mrs. Cogan's mind, she lost all control of herself.

Springing to her feet, her hands outstretched to the judge, "He is not guilty, your Honor!" she shrieked in agony. "He is innocent! I am—" She collapsed and fell to the floor in a dead faint before she could complete the sentence.

The Prosecutor's face beamed as he caught the eye of Jack's lawyer. He made a grimace full of meaning, and whispered:

"What did I tell you, Rudin? *Cherchez la femme!* That is the woman your client is shielding!"

Rudin gaped in astonishment. He was thunderstruck! It put a new complexion on the whole case! *Now* he understood why Waller had insisted on keeping his sister away from the court-room. Evidently he wished to avoid the very thing that had just happened!

Her husband and one of the newspaper artists lifted Mrs. Cogan, and hurriedly carried her down the aisle. Tracy, the writer, who was sitting at the end of one of the seats, jumped up and assisted to carry her out to the anteroom.

For the first time during the trial, Jack showed the strain he was under. His sister's exclamation had surprised, and, for the time being, completely unmanned him! His face, deathly white, was covered with beads of perspiration; and he shook as with an ague! Expecting every moment to hear the judge order his sister's arrest, he closed his eyes, and set his teeth trying to regain his composure; the knuckles of

his hands grasping the woodwork showing white, and the sinews standing out like whipcord.

"I wish the gentlemen of the jury to resume their seats while I address them and the others in this court-room," the judge said slowly and very deliberately.

The jurymen looked sheepishly at each other. They, too, had heard Mrs. Cogan's outburst, and guessed that the judge was going to read them a lecture on the worthlessness of circumstantial evidence; for, according to her own words, Mrs. Cogan was the guilty one.

"I am sorry that you saw fit to bring in the verdict you did," began the judge, noticing their expressions; "I hoped you would have found otherwise." He seemed to have difficulty in speaking calmly. The muscles of his face worked, and his lips tightened, as though he were holding his passion down. "While it may be considered unconventional, nevertheless, I feel justified in the course I now take."

"Phew! Now for a calling down," whispered one juror to his neighbor, who responded with, "Yeah! looks as if he's going to give us hell!"

The Prosecutor and Rudin exchanged glances. They fully expected the judge to point out to the jurymen their mistake in taking the circumstantial evidence at its face value, and to order the arrest of Mrs. Cogan.

"Last evening, on my way home," the judge began, huskily, "while waiting for my train, I glanced over the magazines on the newsstand. Among them was the current issue of the *Manhattan Short Story Magazine.* Hastily scanning the pages, I was attracted by the title of one of the stories."

The persons in the court-room looked wonderingly

at each other. Why—what was the meaning of all this! Did the judge imagine that they were interested in a story in a popular magazine? They expected to hear him order Mrs. Cogan's arrest, or something equally dramatic; but here he was, talking about a magazine he had bought! What had that to do with the case?

"I bought the magazine, and read the story called, '*A Psychic Mystery*,' in the train going home . . . The story affected me so deeply, I have brought it with me to court,"—he held the magazine up so that all could see it,—"and I wish to tell you the brief outline of this particular story." He wiped his glasses slowly and very carefully.

The Prosecutor looked in amazement at Rudin, the lawyer for the defence.

"What's the matter with the old man?" he asked. "Has he gone weak in the head?"

Mrs. Cogan having revived, now quietly entered the court-room with her husband and Tracy. She had again insisted on being present to hear the rest of the proceedings; and Cogan, exacting a solemn promise from her that she would not make any more scenes, had again let her have her way. A friendly policeman found seats for them at the rear of the room. They were just in time to hear the judge say that he wished to give them an outline of the story. Tracy, being interested in stories of all kinds, was about to ask the policeman what story the judge was telling, when the latter continued with his subject.

"The story opens with a description of a class-room in a School of Acting,—a Dramatic School. Students, most of them girls and young women, sit on chairs in

rows. In front of the class is their instructor—an old man, a retired actor. Near him sits another—an actor in the hey-day of his popularity. He is there in the role of visiting critic. He is dressed in the height of fashion. One of the students, named Mary, stands in front of the class; reciting and gesturing. She finishes, bows to her teacher and the visitor. The latter is delighted with her reciting, claps his gloved hands in applause, says her performance is 'fine, very fine.' Mary is very much pleased."

Tracy had no need of asking the policeman any questions, for he listened in astonishment to what was practically the synopsis of his own story; or rather, the story dictated to him by his unseen helper;—in this instance, Benton.

"Do you hear what he is saying, Cogan? That's my story he is reading! In this month's magazine."

The editor looked blankly at Tracy. He had read the story hurriedly in the galley-proofs, but in the stress of the more important matter of Jack's case, had forgotten all about it. As the judge continued, however, Cogan began to recollect it, and wondered what was the object of reading it. In his normal state and under other conditions, he would have been tickled to death to have his magazine get such a free advertisement; but bowed down with sorrow as he was now, that aspect did not occur to him. Mrs. Cogan, her face white and drawn, had no ears for anything but the judge's reading; the scene he had described brought back to her memories of a similar incident in her own student days. She wondered who had written it, and how much the writer knew of *her* experiences.

"As I do not wish to take up your time unnecessarily," the judge went on, adjusting his eyeglasses, "I shall merely give you the salient incidents in the story, which goes on to the visiting critic talking to Mary apart from the students . . . He is a very suave, oily character . . . He covers her with adulation, and flatters her with his appreciation. Gives her his visiting card, invites her to his own Studio, offering to give her private lessons in the art of acting—free. Says he can, and will make a star of her . . . The unsuspecting girl is overwhelmed with the praise and . . . the kind offer. She accepts his invitation. He shakes hands with her, and soon after bids the class and teacher 'good day.'

"The next scene is a richly furnished studio apartment—the actor's . . . Mary keeps her appointment with him, and, at his suggestion, takes off her hat and coat . . . He shows her framed photographs of himself in various characters which hang on the walls, also numerous quaint and beautiful things he has picked up in his wanderings, and on his professional tours; all with the idea of impressing her with a sense of her good fortune in having such a great actor take an interest in her welfare and career.

"He proceeds to give her a lesson; asks her to recite. Now and then, he interrupts to give her advice, and to correct her faults of voice and gesture.

"The lessons continued day after day until . . . on a certain day when they were rehearsing a love scene, he, as the lover, had to embrace Mary . . . He gathers her into his arms, kisses her in a very voluptuous way, his hands stray over her figure as he leers into her eyes. She tries, gently, to disengage herself

from his embrace; for she begins to realize that it is not merely acting. He covers her face with kisses—presses her to him in a sensual manner. Mary, very much frightened—breaks away from him—panting—with fear of she knows not what . . . He pretends to be astonished, tells her that it is only 'make-believe'—acting. Mary knows that it is only too real, and . . . disgusting! She walks to a chair on which her hat and coat lie—she puts her hat on. He expostulates with her—calls her foolish, tells her that if she cannot feel passionate, she will never be a successful actress . . Her fear of him, and the excitement of what she has gone through, is too much for her; she feels faint—asks him for a glass of water. He replies 'why, certainly; with the greatest of pleasure,' turns away with a significant leer, goes into an adjoining room—his bedroom . . . Mary sinks on the chair—almost fainting."

The judge reached for the glass of water on his desk, and sipped a few drops to wet his lips and tongue.

"In the bedroom, the actor pours out a glass of water, takes a small phial of water from his dressing table and pours some of its contents into the glass of water. He goes back into the room where Mary is waiting, and holds the glass to her lips. She drinks half of it, thanks him, leans back in the chair. . . . The actor stands watching her with a satanic smile. . . . Her hand with the glass slowly drops. He seizes the glass, puts it on the table, Mary collapses on the chair in a heap. He chuckles hideously, pulls the hat-pin out of her hat, throws the hat on the

table . . . The poor girl is doped! Rendered unconscious by the stuff he has put into the glass of water! . . . He lifts her from the chair, carries her into his bedroom. Lays her on his bed, looks at her with a lustful expression on his face, goes to the window, pulls down the shade."

The judge paused in his reading to look at his audience.

"There are some things even the devil himself does not dare do in broad daylight," he remarked to the jurors.

The newspaper artists had the chance of their lives —if they had only realized it; for the expressions on the faces of the hearers were worthy of a painter. The men were frowning and biting their lips in suppressed anger, their fists clenched tightly. The women had their heads bowed, most of them crying into their handkerchiefs; even those of the *demi-monde* looked ill at ease. Giving the incidents of the narrative in such a plain, unvarnished fashion, and in a tense, staccato voice, Judge Hargrove made the scenes stand out like etched pictures in the minds of those listening to his recital. Mrs. Cogan pressed her handkerchief to her mouth, unconsciously nodding her head slowly, agreeing with the story the judge was relating. Her husband was glaring with impotent anger; while Tracy was noting the effect his story was producing on the people.

"The next scene," continued the judge, in a faltering voice shaking with emotion, "is one I would willingly omit; but— it is an essential part of the story.

"The poor girl is lying on the bed—resting on her hand as though she had pushed herself up from a re-

clining position. Her hair is disarranged, her waist is open—partly exposing her bosom . . . Pressing her hand to her forehead, she tries to brush away what seems to be a horrible nightmare . . . She notices that her waist is unbuttoned. She gazes around her—dazed . . . Gradually, she realizes where she is. Her jaw drops—her mouth opens—her bosom heaves . . . She feels like shrieking,—she realizes what has happened!

"Slowly . . . stunned by the shock of the discovery, she fastens her waist . . . adjusts her disarranged dress. She goes into the other room where her seducer is lolling in a chair, smoking a cigarette, and smiling a self-satisfied smile . . . With an expression on her face as if she has been turned to stone . . . she comes to him . . . stands in front of him . . . stares stonily at him . . . Slowly picking up her coat and hat, she backs slowly to the door, and . . . goes out."

Taking off his glasses to wipe the tears from his eyes, Judge Hargrove lowered his head, and swallowed the lump in his throat. He was as much affected by the story as were his auditors. Regaining his composure, he resumed:

"Poor Mary goes home to the boarding house where she is staying to write a letter to her only living relative. The letter the poor, outraged girl wrote, told of the shocking crime committed on her innocent, defenceless body; told of her intention to destroy all clues to her identity; to travel to another city where she was not known, and . . . to take her own life; for she could not live with such a stain on her soul . . . The letter gave the name of her seducer . . . The one to whom she wrote the letter, swore to avenge her!"

By this time, most of the women were crying audi-

bly; the men had their heads bowed—as though in shame.

"The next scene is on a country road . . . The actor, the polished gentleman of the world, the seducer of the innocent girl, is walking down the road on his way to the railroad station . . . Mary's avenger steps out from behind a tree and stops him. In a few words he recalls the incident to the actor's memory; tells him he is there to avenge Mary's death, and . . . shoots him! Bending down, he assures himself the actor is dead. The avenger walks quickly to the side of the road, and disappears in the dark shadows of the trees . . . He sees a woman run to the dead man. She has a revolver in her hand. She bends down and discovers that he is dead; then runs back up the road from whence she came! . . . That is the brief outline of the story, which ends with the question: 'Who killed the actor?' "

A thrill ran over the audience as his hearers grasped the meaning of the question: "Who killed the actor?" and looked at Jack who was white as death and shaking like a leaf.

Everyone in the room saw now what the judge's object was in reading the story to them; for they realized that a woman was in the case, and that Jack knew who she was. The impression was accentuated when the Prosecutor stood up, and looked toward the rear of the court-room. When he was seen to speak hurriedly to the court officer who, evidently acting on his instructions, walked up the aisle to where Mrs. Cogan sat with her husband and Tracy, they felt sure that her arrest was a matter of only a few seconds. Everybody was tense with expectation! The repor-

ters' fingers sped over their paper, feverishly describing in sensational phrases the dramatic denouement the judge had sprung on his audience. The court-room was all of a hubbub!

The Prosecutor leaned over to Rudin. "How's that for a surprise? The old man isn't so crazy as I thought he was! Didn't I tell you to look for the woman? Now what do you think?"

Rudin sat looking blankly at Jack who seemed carved out of stone.

The judge rapped sharply for silence.

When the noise in the room had dropped to a low murmuring of voices, Judge Hargrove took his eyeglasses off his nose, laid them on his desk, and said:

"I do not know where or how the author got his story, but . . . that story . . . is . . . true!"

All in the room stared at the judge in astonishment. The silence was profound!

"The name of the seducer in the story is, by a peculiar coincidence, *Denton.* The real name is *Benton!* The innocent, trusting girl . . . was . . . my dear . . . darling granddaughter!"

For the first time during the narrative, the judge broke down, and sobbed like a child.

The effect was electrical! For the instant, the audience seemed turned to stone images! The lawyers stared at each other—dazed! Jack all at once lost his woe-begone expression, and, glancing to where his sister sat, heaved a great sigh of relief.

Judge Hargrove rose slowly to his feet. He appeared to have aged in the past few minutes. In a tense voice, shaking with emotion, he said:

"Gentlemen of the jury . . . In spite of the verdict

you have found against the accused, and which I now put aside, I declare the prisoner at the bar innocent of the crime with which he is charged, and hereby direct that he goes free . . . He is not guilty!"

He turned to face the people, some of whom were casting glances over their shoulders toward the rear of the room.

"My little Mary is avenged! *I . . . killed . . . Benton!*"

He almost shrieked the words.

As though impelled by an interior impulse, he started to walk off the bench to go to his private room.

Suddenly, he stopped, clutched feebly at his breast, tried to steady himself. He reeled backward and collapsed, with his head hanging over the edge of the desk. His mouth opened and a thin, dark stream of blood trickled from between his lips.

The court-room was in an uproar! Everybody yelling at the top of their voices!

The high tension in which the strain of the reading of the story had held the people now broke, and under the reaction due to the confession of the judge, the place looked as if pandemonium had broken loose.

The court attendants, the Prosecutor, and the alienist rushed on to the bench to assist the judge to his chair.

Gradually, a hush fell over the room when the Prosecutor held up his hands for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Judge Hargrove has gone to a Higher Tribunal!" he said, solemnly.

XXVIII

When Jack, with the aid of the Prosecutor and his own lawyer, was able to free himself from the attentions of his sympathizers and admirers who insisted on shaking hands, and showering congratulations on him, he passed out of the court-room with his sister, her husband, and Tracy to the automobile the Prosecutor kindly put at his service. The little party drove off amid the cheers of the people who had crowded out of the court-house, and was soon speeding toward the Cogans' home.

The journey was made in silence; each being occupied with his—and her—own thoughts.

Mrs. Cogan, inert, sat in a stupor with her head resting on her brother's breast; the inevitable reaction having come, bringing with it a collapse of her nerve-force. Jack sat upright, his arm thrown protectingly around his sister's shoulders; his eyes full of a glad light. Cogan nervously chewed the end of his moustache, cudgelling his brain for answers to the various questions which arose in his mind; for, to him, the affair had become still more complex and extraordinary.

What bothered him was: if Jack was not guilty, why had he not said so? What was his reason for allowing himself to be branded with the accusation of

being a murderer, and running the risk of suffering the penalty? Cogan could not understand it at all!

He of all those in the court-room (with the exception of his wife and Tracy) had been the only to catch the judge's words aright. The judge had said plainly enough that the *avenger* (whom he spoke of as "he") had fired at Benton, and then went on to say that he had seen a woman with a revolver in her hand, bending over the actor's body.

The people in the audience, whose minds were full of the idea that *a woman* was at the bottom of it all, had, strange to say, overlooked that point. Their minds were so set on discovering *the* woman—whoever she was, that when they heard the judge tell of *a* woman, they jumped to the conclusion that the woman had committed the deed.

Perhaps Cogan, having his memory refreshed by the judge's reading, recollected the end of the story, and so was prepared. Anyhow, the idea that his own wife might be *the woman* in the case did not enter his mind for a moment; consequently, Jack's willingness to be a martyr puzzled him exceedingly. Evidently, there was some unknown woman mixed up in the affair whom Jack loved, and whom he was willing to shield. He wondered who she was.

"Come along, sis, old girl," whispered Jack to his sister when the car pulled up at the front gate. "Harold is waiting for us."

At the mention of her child's name, she straightened up wearily and smiled a tired smile.

"Pull yourself together now," advised Jack, patting her on the shoulder. "We are home—home! Be a brave soldier now, Kitty."

"God bless you, Jack, boy!" she whispered fervently, looking at him with a new light shining in her moist eyes. "I have just now seen that picture of the two brothers of long ago, and—*now I understand!*" She leaned forward and kissed him tenderly.

"You did! That's great! I am so glad. Now you can understand the tie between us."

She nodded affirmatively.

Her boy Harold was wild with delight at seeing his Uncle Jack again; and as they went up the garden path with his chubby arms wound tightly round Jack's neck, he lisped his welcome, "I loves 'oo; I loves 'oo so much!" in between the kisses he lavished on his uncle's thin face. His mother clung to her brother's other arm, smiling happily at her offspring.

"God bless his dear little heart," she said; then in a whisper to Jack: "and make him a noble, brave man like you!"

When they arrived at the entrance to the house, Tracy wished to leave and return to town; for, as he said, "You people would rather be alone without having an outsider butting in."

Cogan pooh-poohed the idea; and grabbing Tracy's arm, forcibly detained him.

"You are the last man I'd accuse of butting in, old scout! You are no outsider; you are one of this family from now on. Only for you and your crazy spiritual stuff—God bless you!—we should be a very unhappy family. Besides, I want to know more about that story, old man."

Mrs. Cogan added her entreaties to her husband's words.

"Yes, please, Mr. Tracy; if for only this once! We

are under a greater debt to you than you may be aware of."

Later on, when the dinner things were cleared away, and Harold had been prevailed on by his uncle to go to bed, the three men—Jack, Cogan, and Tracy—went into the parlor to smoke their cigars.

After a short silence, Cogan suddenly broke in with: "Do you know, that business isn't quite clear to me even now!"

The others knew he referred to the case. They looked at him.

"For instance: there is one question I should like answered," he continued; "that is, if you have no objection, Jack."

"Even without knowing what the question is, I have no objection. What is it, Tom?"

"I should like to know why the dickens you did not assert your innocence, instead of—er—doing as you did."

"I *did* say that I was innocent," replied Jack. "I told you, I told the lawyer, and also the alienist; I couldn't do more, could I? But you fellows seemed to have the idea that I was guilty, and that I had committed the deed because—" he laughed sadly—"well, be cause I was not quite sane!"

"Ye-es," admitted Cogan slowly, "I guess that's right, old chap! I'll own up; that was my opinion. But . . ." he stumbled in his effort to get at the real

question in his mind—"did you know that you were shielding the real criminal?"

Although he expected to be asked the question—sometime, he did not quite know what answer to make. That very question and what his answer should be had occupied his thoughts all the way from the court-house; and he had not arrived at a definite course of action. Now, he was nonplussed, and wondered how he ought to reply.

"I'll answer that, Tom," said Mrs. Cogan, who had quietly come into the room and heard her husband's question. She nodded and smiled at her brother's quick glance of inquiry. Cogan wheeled round to look at her in amazement.

"You remember Jack telling of the visions he had seen when on guard in the trenches—the two brothers in Ancient Carthage, the one disguised as a girl while his brother went to the war?"

"Ye-es, I remember," replied her husband.

"And afterwards the younger brother joins the army, and defends the trench while the elder one is lying wounded?"

Cogan looked from his wife to Jack, wondering what was coming.

"Jack told us that he recognized himself in the young boy, but didn't tell us who the other was; he only said that he had sacrificed himself for the younger brother. Coming up in the car this afternoon," continued Mrs. Cogan, "the same vision appeared to me. Not quite the same as Jack described, but enough like it for me to recognize the scene and the two brothers."

Cogan chewed on his cigar, wondering if by any chance his wife's mind was affected by the strenuous

experiences she had gone through during the past few weeks. Tracy was all ears, bending forward to listen intently.

"To make a long story short, I recognized myself in the elder brother," announced Mrs. Cogan.

"Well, supposing you did, what has that got to do with Jack and this—business?" asked her husband, looking mystified.

"As I, in past time—in a former life, had sacrificed myself for Jack, now—in this life, the younger brother—who is Jack—felt it his duty to sacrifice himself for me, and so pay the ancient debt."

"Sacrifice himself for you!" Cogan shouted. "Where the devil do *you* come in? What have *you* done that he should feel it necessary to sacrifice himself for *you?*"

He viewed with amazement Jack's action of going to Mrs. Cogan, and grasping her shoulder to hearten her for the coming ordeal of her confession.

Between sobs, and with broken accents, she bravely told of her acquaintance with Benton when she was studying elocution; and of the letters full of youthful gush she had written to him in return for his criticism and coaching in the dramatic art. Told, too, how the experience of *Mary* in Tracy's story closely paralleled her own, with the difference that she had severed the acquaintanceship in time to save her honor.

When she was relating the sufferings she had gone through after Benton's advent in their home, she had great difficulty in keeping from breaking down. As she unfolded the tale of how the actor had threatened her with the letters; of her agony of spirit at the prospect of being separated from her husband and the

loss of her child, Cogan, whose shoulders had been heaving suspiciously, suddenly broke down. Throwing himself on his knees at her side, he put his arms around her, and dropping his head on her lap, groaned like a wounded animal.

As she went on, telling how she had made up her mind that the only way out of her difficulties was to shoot Benton, Cogan sprang to his feet, the tears streaming down his cheeks, his fists clenched.

"Oh! Kitty! Kitty!" he sobbed, "why in hell didn't you tell me all this then? I would have torn his black heart out with my bare hands. The damned scoundrel!"

"I was afraid you would not believe my explanation," she replied.

"Huh! That's the woman of it!" Cogan exclaimed in a tone of disgust. "After all these years of fighting and scrimping for you; putting up with insults from nincompoops that are not fit to wipe my shoes, so that I could earn the necessary money for you and the kid; working myself to a frazzle to make your lot a little easier; and after all—you were afraid to trust me! God bless the women!" he added, bitterly.

"Don't be harsh with me, Tom," wailed his wife. "God knows I have paid dearly and enough for my foolishness."

"All right, old girl," replied Cogan, his burst of temper subsiding. "I cannot expect to change woman's nature any more than I can change a leopard's spots!"

"Isn't it just possible, Tom," asked Jack mildly, "that your present attitude is affected by the fact of the disclosure of Benton's guilt? Perhaps you would not

have been so ready to believe him a villain a few weeks ago. If I remember rightly, you would not accept my estimate of him."

"Perhaps not, Jack, old chap," replied Cogan, apologetically. "I must confess that I am prone to believe that all men are as clean-minded and honest as myself." He turned to his wife, and patted her shoulder gently. "But go on, Kitty, girl; let's have the rest while you are about it."

Seeing now that she need have no fear of her husband's displeasure, Mrs. Cogan partly regained her composure. Continuing her narrative, she told them of her going down the road to wait for the actor, intending to shoot him; of being balked by the sudden passing of the automobile; the hearing of the shot, and the finding of the dead body.

At this point Jack took up the thread, and told of the part he had taken up to the time when he was found at the side of the body and arrested.

"Oh!" cried Cogan. "Now—now I see it all! You thought that Kitty had fired the shot, and you were willing to take the blame."

"It was the only thing I could do, Tom," he said, simply.

Cogan threw his arms around his shoulders, and with tears streaming out of his own eyes looked into Jack's; his face expressing the thanks his quivering lips were unable to put into words.

To break the tension, Tracy put the question: "Would you mind telling us why you kept silent, Mrs. Cogan; for you knew that you were not guilty of Benton's death? I am asking merely from a writer's point of view."

"I was under the impression that she was guilty," interposed Jack, quickly; "and told her to keep silent . . . for her child's sake."

"The sad truth is, Mr. Tracy," she said repentantly, "I was a coward! I was afraid of what Mr. Cogan would think and do when he heard of the letters."

Her husband smiled grimly, and turned to Tracy. "Now, old scout; tell us how you came to write that story."

The writer for the next hour or so held them spellbound as he related the numerous happenings in his life which had forced him, beyond any question of doubt, to the point where he was assured that there was, beyond our physical senses, a world teeming with thinking entities—the so-called dead and other beings —who were in constant touch with us in this Earth-world. That there were men and women whose psychic faculties were developed to the stage where it was possible for them to see and hear those living in the other and higher worlds.

"Unfortunately," he sighed, "I can only hear. I cannot see—as yet. I sincerely hope that my psychic sight will be opened before I pass out; for I have heard from others of the wonderful things to be seen."

"I have had both sight and hearing opened," Jack asserted calmly, "but only on what were, evidently, special occasions and for special reasons. To what I have seen and heard is due the change in my attitude toward life. I used to be, as you know, a near-atheist; but that, I am glad to say, can never again be possible; for I have seen and heard that which no physical words can describe!

"Much is said of bravery shown by a man in the

heat and excitement of fighting; but sitting by one's self in a cell for long hours, trying to keep one's courage from failing so as not to be a coward, is a much severer test, I think. I am afraid I should have been unequal to the strain, but for the visions some kind friend enabled me to see and hear. Some kind friend on an upper plane who stimulated my psychic faculties, and so made it possible."

"Tell us, Jack!" whispered his sister, her arm encircling his.

"I have seen light so brilliant that the sun, by comparison, would be a rushlight. I have seen forms so beautiful, words fail to express their loveliness. I have listened to music so grand and glorious as to be indescribable. I have heard a Voice, tender and loving as that of a young mother cooing to her first-born; exquisite accents that fell like a healing balm on one's tortured, weary soul; sad with the sadness and woe of lost souls; exultant as a vivid trumpet-blast with joy over the coming of a new helper in the sacred Cause of Humanity. A Voice that when IT spoke seemed to fill the whole Universe—as if there were nothing else existent but ITS Sound!

"I have, *in full consciousness*, been lifted up to a plane of being where Time and Space did not exist; where Past, Present, and Future were the Eternal NOW. A plane from whence souls on Earth—in physical bodies, seemed but motes, dimly seen in darkness, sorrowing over puerile, childish troubles; not knowing that they were entangled in a web of their own illusions which prevented them realizing their own God-like attributes. Such an experience cannot be de-

scribed in physical plane language. The very best I can do is to say: *I touched the hem of the Garment!*"

He seemed exalted by the recollections.

"I am glad to have your corroborations of some of my experiences," said Tracy; "but as I can only hear, and not see, I have to accept much on faith."

"I think I can honestly say: 'I know!'" Jack said in a decisive tone. "I have had too many visions in broad daylight, when I was wide awake, to have them dismissed as 'hallucinations;' and you know that an ounce of knowledge is worth a ton of cynical unbelief."

Cogan who had listened thoughtfully to Jack's account of his visions, turned to Tracy to say, "Well, Tracy, old scout, I hope you will forgive me for having scoffed at your 'higher thought' business. It really seems as if there *are* more things in heaven and earth . . ."

"Than most people have any idea of," interposed Jack, with a serious look. "*Inspiration from above* being one of the greatest; and what the world today needs most!"

Author's note: Tracy—who knows more about these matters than I—says that as this story has a "Prologue," logically, it should have an "Epilogue." Having done what I think is my share of the work—writing the account of the happenings, I suggested that he ought to write the epilogue. The following is his idea of it:

EPILOGUE

* * * *

'The kingdom of heaven is within you'—*Jesus.*

'Nothing can work me damage but myself'—
St. Bernard.

'Men must reap the things they sow,
Force from force must ever flow'—*Shelley.*

'Before beginning, and without an end,
As space eternal, and as surety sure,
Is fixed a Power divine which moves to good,
Only its laws endure.

It will not be contemned of any one;
Who thwarts it loses, and who serves it gains;
The hidden good it pays with peace and bliss,
The hidden ill with pains.

It knows not wrath nor pardon; utter-true
Its measures mete, its faultless balance weighs;
Times are as naught, tomorrow it will judge,
Or after many days.

The books say well, my brothers! each man's life
The outcome of his former living is;
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes,
The bygone right breeds bliss.

That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields!
The sesamum was sesamum, the corn
Was corn. The silence and the darkness knew;
So is a man's fate born'—*Sir Edwin Arnold*—
LIGHT OF ASIA.

'What thou wouldst not like to be done to you,
Do not to others: this is the fundamental law'—
Hillel.

'Your only saviour is your deeds'—*Zoroaster.*

'Work out your own salvation. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'—
St. Paul.

'Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee,'—*Jesus.*

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